McCAIN'S ECONOMIC 'TEAM'
ANDREW FERGUSON

the weekly
Standard

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# JUST DESERTS

The terrorist blown up in Damascus last week was no ordinary Hezbollah operative.

THOMAS JOSCELYN reports on Imad Mugniyah's relationship with Osama bin Laden

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*—Michael Schwartz*

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*— Peter Thiel*

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BPA INTERNATIONAL



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# They're Sorry, So Sorry

Readers occasionally ask The Scrapbook how we keep the girlish figure. Do we diet, drink lots of water, do pilates? None of these things, actually. We eat whatever we want, then we induce vomiting. How? We've always found it simplest just to turn on *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* on MSNBC.

Olbermann, for you non-MSNBC viewers (which is to say, most Americans) is the formerly charming ESPN anchorman who repurposed himself as a leftwing firebrand doing discount Edward R. Murrow impressions (he stole the "Good night, and good luck" sign-off, hoping viewers would mistake him for a serious person) and delivering pompous "you-sir!" diatribes against easy targets like Donald Rumsfeld.

Anyway, there were plenty of players who covered themselves in shame in the recent fracas over MSNBC reporter David Shuster's lapse into witless ghetto-speak, suggesting on the air that Chelsea Clinton, who'd gone so far as to call superdelegates on her mom's behalf, was "sort of being pimped out" by her mom's campaign.

The Clinton campaign, for one, pimped the pimp-story, trying to run up the score on MSNBC with calculated outrage, being unreceptive to apologies, threatening not to participate in the cable channel's upcoming debate, and implying that Shuster, who has been suspended, should be fired. NBC suits embarrassed themselves by groveling to the Clintons and suspending their reporter for a questionable choice of words.

Shuster embarrassed himself with a fawning apology (understandable, since he's fighting for his career) in which he said that "all Americans should be proud of Chelsea Clinton, and I'm particularly sorry that my language diminished the regard and respect she has earned from all of us and the respect her parents have earned in how they raised her." Spare us the MSNBC Good Parenting Award.

But the real kicker came after Shuster's apology, from none other than Keith Olbermann. Not that he needed to weigh in. Shuster does file reports for Olbermann, but was guest-hosting Tucker Carlson's show when he offered his pimp observations. And Shuster had already apologized—twice. That didn't keep Olbermann, however, from pronouncing on his own show: "It was an utterly inappropriate and indefensible thing to say. [The] Clintons have every right to be furious, hurt, and appalled. Many of us here have similar reactions. Ones that transcend political parties and politics itself. David has been suspended and [it] remains only for me to apologize without limit to President Clinton, to Senator Clinton, and to Ms. Clinton on behalf of MSNBC. We are literally, dreadfully, sorry."

Strange that Olbermann wasn't similarly furious, hurt and appalled when *Village Voice* columnist Michael Musto had previously suggested—in ban-

# What He Was Thinking

BILL CLINTON VISITS BOWIE, MARYLAND, CHURCH, FEBRUARY 10. © WASHINGTON POST

HE SURE DOES LOVE TALKING. YEAH, I BET YOU FEEL MY PAIN—THE PAIN OF SITTING IN THIS STIFF CHAIR WHILE YOU KEEP ON YAPPING. HE MUST BE HUNGRY—HE KEEPS ON BITING THAT LOWER LIP. WHAT DID HE JUST SAY? SOMETHING ABOUT REACHING OUT TO EACH OTHER? LOOKS LIKE HE'S GONNA REACH OUT RIGHT NOW WITH THAT FINGER OF HIS. THAT'S GOTTA BE THE LONGEST FINGER I HAVE EVER SEEN. AND KINDA CROOKED, TOO. WHAT WAS IT THAT DAD SAID ABOUT HIM? SOMETHING THAT HE DID BUT I JUST CAN'T REMEMBER. WHY AM I PICTURING A CIGAR?



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*(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of June 12, 2000)*

ter with Olbermann on Olbermann's show—that both Katie Holmes and Angelina Jolie had "pimped" their babies (surely a newborn baby is more innocent than even the 27-year-old Chelsea). Nor did Olbermann find the word objectionable when he himself used it, accusing President Bush ("your hypocrisy is so vast, sir") of "pimping" General David Petraeus.

We're not huge fans of David Shuster, but when he gets off suspension—if he gets off suspension—he would be within his rights to give Olbermann a good pimp-slapping. We'd even tune into MSNBC to see it. ♦

## And the Winner Is…

The Academy Awards are not usually on The Scrapbook's list of things to watch, but we will be rooting for a few favorites when the 80th annual awards show is aired this Sunday, February 24. Praised by our own critic John Podhoretz, the movie *Juno*, about a pregnant teenage hipster who chooses adoption over abortion, is up for best picture, best original screenplay, best director (Jason Reitman), and best actress (Ellen Page). Regarding best documentary, we are indifferent to the winner but decidedly rooting against *No End in Sight* (i.e., in Iraq) and *Sicko* (Michael Moore admiring Cuba's health care system).

But most of all, The Scrapbook is hoping this year's Oscar for best foreign language film goes to *Katyn*. Directed by the legendary Andrzej Wajda, the movie commemorates the Soviet massacre of 14,500 Polish officers and other members of Poland's intelligentsia in 1940 at the behest of Stalin and carried out by the NKVD—a crime Moscow finally acknowledged in 1990. "Let it spin a tale about the suffering and drama of many Katyn families," said Wajda, whose father, Captain Jakub Wajda, was among the victims.

Wajda's concern is that "the young generation . . . is moving away from our past. Busy with mundane matters, they forget names and dates, which, no matter if we want it or not, create us as a nation with its fears and misgivings surfacing at every political opportunity." The director had seen a high school student on television who failed to recognize the significance of the date September 17 (when the Red Army invaded Poland in 1939, a few weeks after the Nazis attacked from the west). "Maybe thanks to our film, the young man asked about Katyn will be able to say more than that it is the name of a small town not far away from Smolensk." ♦

## St. Barack (cont.)

"Mr. Obama's national field director, Cuauhtemoc Figueroa, vowed that Mr. Obama's effort in Texas would be different.

"'You are going to see Senator Obama campaign the way he did in Iowa," Mr. Figueroa said. "We're going to take him to little communities so that he's not only going to touch voters with his words, he's going to be able to reach out and physically touch them'" (*New York Times*, February 12). ♦



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# Casual

## My First of Many Super Bowls

Can you imagine spending $29,385 on a football game? That sum, nearly as much as the average Mississippi household earns in a year, is what Massachusetts native Marcel Nadeau paid to take his two sons to the Super Bowl.

Why?

"I'm confident the Patriots will win," he said before the game.

Mmmmm, how to put it? That stinks.

For about the same amount, Mr. Nadeau could have had a never-before-driven 2008 BMW 128 ($28,000). Or he might have bought a three-bedroom, one-bath summer home for sale right now in Batesville, Arkansas. Or he could have stood outside the stadium and given each of the 75,000 ticket holders one pre-game Pabst Blue Ribbon.

So is this Marcel Nadeau crazy? No, he just has more money that most of us. NFL teams have inspired this kind of fanaticism across the country. According to a recent Harris poll, professional football is almost as popular as baseball, auto racing, and basketball—the next three pro sports—combined. Plus, Mr. Nadeau got three nights' hotel, breakfast, and transportation to and from the game.

I went for free, as one of nearly 5,000 credentialed journalists from around the world. (On an unrelated note, it's worth mentioning that the NFL employees who deal with the media are the best in the world at this kind of work. And those involved in credentialing deserve a big, fat raise.)

As a writer there to cover the game and to do some reporting for a longer article on the NFL, I could pick and choose among Super Bowl week's non-game-related activities. Not surprisingly, I didn't make it to a breakfast sponsored by "NFL Play 60," the league's "youth health and fitness campaign." No bacon? No thanks. I also passed on an opportunity to see "The Tazón Latino II"—a flag football game between retired NFL players and Latino celebrities—that took place at something called "The NFL Experience Built by Home Depot," sponsored by Coors Light.

My NFL experience could not have been better. On Friday night, I walked down the red carpet at the Scottsdale Performing Arts Center to attend *ESPN the Magazine*'s athlete-studded "What's Next?" party. There was C.C. Sabathia, Brian Westbrook, Marcellus Wiley, Willie McGinest. I thought I'd fake out the long line of eager photographers by pulling my baseball cap down over my eyes and shielding my face from the blinding flashes the way the celebrities do. But those flashes never came because the only pro athlete I resemble now is bowler Brian Himmler.

In a feeble attempt to combine my interest in football and my interest in politics, and because the game was in John McCain's home state two days before Super Tuesday, I spent the weekend asking anyone I recognized who they support for president. Jerry Jones, owner of the Dallas Cowboys, told me he had maxed out his support to McCain. MC Hammer, who looks just the same as he did when I saw him live in 1991, wouldn't touch it. Sean Payton, coach of the New Orleans Saints, also demurred, but gave me a hint about his politics. "I'd much rather tell you who I'm supporting here," he said. "The Giants. They're the more conservative club." Jim Belushi, an avid Chicago Bears fan, said he planned to write in his choice. "Mike Ditka."

With all of the hype surrounding the Super Bowl, it's easy to see how the game itself sometimes gets lost. Not this year. The undefeated New England Patriots came to Arizona poised to make history as the NFL's first 19-0 team. Instead, they made history by losing—the second biggest upset since the first Super Bowl some four decades ago. The highlight of the game—and possibly of the decade—came when Eli Manning shed three Patriots defenders to fire a pass 32 yards downfield to David Tyree, who seemed to defy the laws of nature by clutching the ball against his helmet and then holding on as he crashed to the turf. That Tyree was a relatively unknown player who had lost his mother six weeks earlier gave the narrative further dramatic appeal.

There to witness the upset, in seats on the 50-yard line, was Marc, a mutual fund manager who told the Associated Press that he paid $40,000 for a package that included tickets for himself and his three young sons, all Giants fans. "I see it as a once in a lifetime event," he said. "It's not something I'm going to do on a regular basis."

I'm different. I do see it as something I'd like to do on a regular basis. (On an unrelated note, did I mention how great the NFL . . . )

**Stephen F. Hayes**

DARREN GYGI



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## Letters of State

In Michael Rubin's article "Living in a Dream World" (January 21), the author cherry-picks a few comments drawn from the "Post of the Month" feature in *State Magazine* to claim that Foreign Service officers are out of touch with reality. Using their casual comments about living accommodations as a gauge on how Foreign Service officers analyze the politics of a country is a misleading distortion.

Many of the posts in which we serve have difficult challenges both politically and socially. Moreover, change in these nations often comes only slowly. Rubin's dismissive comments reflect his ignorance of how small changes can have a significant impact on a society. Despite the fact that the demands on the State Department outpace our resources, department employees comprise the world's finest diplomatic service. They are on the front lines defending America's interests and protecting its citizens. Under Secretary Rice's leadership, we have reorganized and reoriented ourselves toward the new front lines to address the unique challenges posed by the war on terror.

In today's Foreign Service, the majority of our employees assigned overseas serve at difficult posts, including Khartoum where two outstanding USAID employees were recently brutally murdered. Since 2003, over 2,000 of our employees have volunteered and served in Iraq or Afghanistan. The number of employees serving abroad with only some or none of their family members at post has quadrupled since 2001.

Taking informal comments out of context for the purpose of ridicule is unfair. Rubin should be ashamed.

Amb. Harry K. Thomas Jr.
*Director General*
*U.S. Department of State*
*Washington, D.C.*

Michael Rubin's article on the State Department accurately describes the broken nature of the State Department, but it is not the individuals themselves who are the problem. It is the dysfunctional structure of the department. In 2004, I was recruited from my law firm to serve in an experimental unit of the State Department called the Afghanistan Reconstruction Group (ARG). As the legal adviser in ARG from 2004 to 2005, I worked with many career State Department officials. As in all bureaucracies, some were better (or worse) than others, but the best career officials were truly terrific.

Nevertheless, State does not function well in the crucial role to which it is assigned in the war on terror. There are at least two reasons for this failure, which were painfully obvious to even a short term diplomat like me.

First, State rotates its people around the world as often as the Army shifts its officers, but whereas an infantry officer remains an infantry officer no matter where he is, a State Department official is shifted to a completely alien culture and barely has time to learn it before he is shifted again. A perfect example of this problem occurred when the ARG health adviser had to deal with construction plans that USAID drew up for a health clinic, over 400 of which were being built around Afghanistan. He pointed out that the clinic would be unacceptable in a Muslim country because it expected men and women to share a waiting room. "Why not?" asked the USAID official in charge, "They worked great in Colombia."

The second obvious problem is that too many State Department employees are burdened with purely bureaucratic busywork. Although I only served a year with ARG, I had the ability to roam far and wide and meet any number of Afghan ministers. I thought that was something all State Department people had the right to do. But when I congratulated one excellent official for having his tour extended, so that he could see projects through, he gloomily replied that "it was different for ARG, because you get to meet people. I spend most of my time writing cables back to Washington."

If the State Department moves most of its people around too often for them to understand a country and then bogs them down in bureaucratic paperwork, it is no surprise that the United States isn't getting the diplomatic results it needs. But don't blame the people. The best of them (and there are a lot of those) are the best anywhere in the government. They just work in a system that stifles them.

Thomas F. Berner
*West Palm Beach, Fla.*

**Michael Rubin Responds:** Ambassador Thomas's energies would be better spent reminding some U.S. diplomats which country's interest they should promote. That Foreign Service officers believe Lesotho to be a model for Africa or that Gambia and Oman, the latter of which balked at supporting Operation Enduring Freedom, are key allies in the war on terrorism demonstrates analytical dissonance.

The recent death of a USAID worker and his driver in Sudan should remind us that when diplomats, whether out of naiveté, political correctness, or life in a bubble, downplay or mischaracterize radical Islamism, the result is a threat not only to our missions abroad, but also to long-term U.S. security.

I thank Thomas Berner for his thoughtful comments and his service.

## Correction

Fred Siegel's review of Bruce Miroff's *The Liberals' Moment* ("Come Home, America," January 28) incorrectly stated that Miroff was a "veteran of the McGovern campaign."

• • •

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the weekly Standard

# No Good Deed . . .

Lately we've been hearing that California has been restored to its historic position as harbinger of America's political future. Let's hope not.

On January 29, in a party-line vote, Democrats in the California Assembly approved AB 624, which requires "every private, corporate, and public operating foundation" with "assets over $250 million" to disclose, "among other things":

¶the "race, gender, and sexual orientation" of its board of directors and staff;

¶the "percentage of . . . contracts" awarded to businesses owned "by specified groups";

¶the "number of grants and percentage of grant dollars" awarded to groups serving "specified communities"; and

¶the "number of grants and percentage of grant dollars" awarded to groups "where the grantee's board of directors and/or staff" belong to "specified groups."

Which "groups" and "communities" are "specified"? The legislation does not say, though that whole bit about "race, gender, and sexual orientation" offers a clue. AB 624's vague language notwithstanding, the required information must be "posted on each private foundation's Internet website" and published in its "annual report." And there will be no exceptions.

This gratuitous and unprecedented imposition on the nonprofit sector has been met with surprisingly little opposition. AB 624 is expected to pass the California Senate, and Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger may even sign it into law. (His office says he has "no position.") It's not as if California's privacy-rights community is concerned. What is the position of the Southern California chapter of the ACLU on legislation that would force private foundation diversity officers to run around each year asking employees whether they like girls or boys? "We don't have a position," says a spokesman.

The legislation's author says that his intentions are benign. AB 624 "does not require foundations to invest in minority communities," writes Assemblyman Joe Coto. "It does not create racial quotas for grant making and employment." No, Coto's legislation is a "simple attempt" to require foundations to "disclose key data related to diversity on an annual basis." Such data are necessary because foundation "grant making and governance" suffer from a "lack of diversity. . . . A number of studies" say so, he declares.

The study Coto has in mind is "Fairness in Philanthropy" (2005) by the Berkeley-based Greenlining Institute, the sort of place that bestows a "profile in courage" award on Representative Barbara Lee for casting the lone vote in opposition to authorizing the use of force against al Qaeda and the Taliban back in 2001. In 2006, the Greenlining folks followed up "Fairness in Philanthropy" with "Investing in a Diverse Democracy: Foundation Giving to Minority-Led Nonprofits." Both studies purport to reveal, in "alarming" detail, a "dramatic philanthropic divide" between "minority-led nonprofits" and "non-minority-led" nonprofits. Did you know, for example, that "independent foundations awarded only *3 percent* of grant dollars and *4.3 percent* of grants to minority-led organizations" in 2002? (Emphasis in the original.) Or that "five independent foundations" studied by the Greenlining Institute awarded "*no* grants" to "minority-led organizations"?

Historically, foundations have been free to direct money wherever they want, as long as it is being spent on genuinely charitable purposes. Let's leave aside, however, the numerous questions that Joe Coto's bill and the Greenlining Institute's research raise involving donor intent and the role of foundations in American society. Let's also leave aside the false argument that the government is legally permitted to require race, gender, and sexual orientation disclosure on the basis of the foundation sector's tax exemption, which is like saying that because the IRS allows you a mortgage deduction it also gets to know everything that's going on in your house. And let's leave aside the insidious racial essentialism that plagues all such bills and studies—the idea that only "minority-led organizations" are able to serve the interests of minority populations. Instead, let's just take a cursory look at the methodology by which the Greenlining Institute arrived at its "alarming" findings.

The authors of "Fairness in Philanthropy" examined data from the "top 50 independent foundations and the top 25 community foundations by total giving in 2002." This sample is "by no means representative" of the foundation sector at large, the Greenlining authors admit. Using subscriber-based databases like Guidestar, the researchers compiled a list of the groups to whom foundations were awarding grants. Whereupon they investigated whether or not those groups were "minority-led."

What counts as a "minority-led" group? "A *minority-led* organization," the authors of "Fairness in Philanthropy" write, "is one whose staff is 50 percent or more minority; whose board of directors is 50 percent or more minority; and whose mission statement and charitable programs aim



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to predominantly serve and empower minority communities or populations." How many grantees fit these criteria the report's authors do not say.

And they probably can't say, because if they did they would reveal that the fix was in from the start. The United States is a multiracial, multiethnic country, but the combined numbers of "blacks," "Hispanics," and "Asians" equal only about a third of the total population. The "50 percent or more minority" number is therefore entirely *un*-representative. Also, it's ridiculously high. You could have a foundation whose chairman was a minority, or whose board and staff were both 49.99 percent minorities, and it still wouldn't qualify as a "minority-led organization" in the Greenlining Institute's view. Assemblyman Coto's bill is based on seriously flawed research.

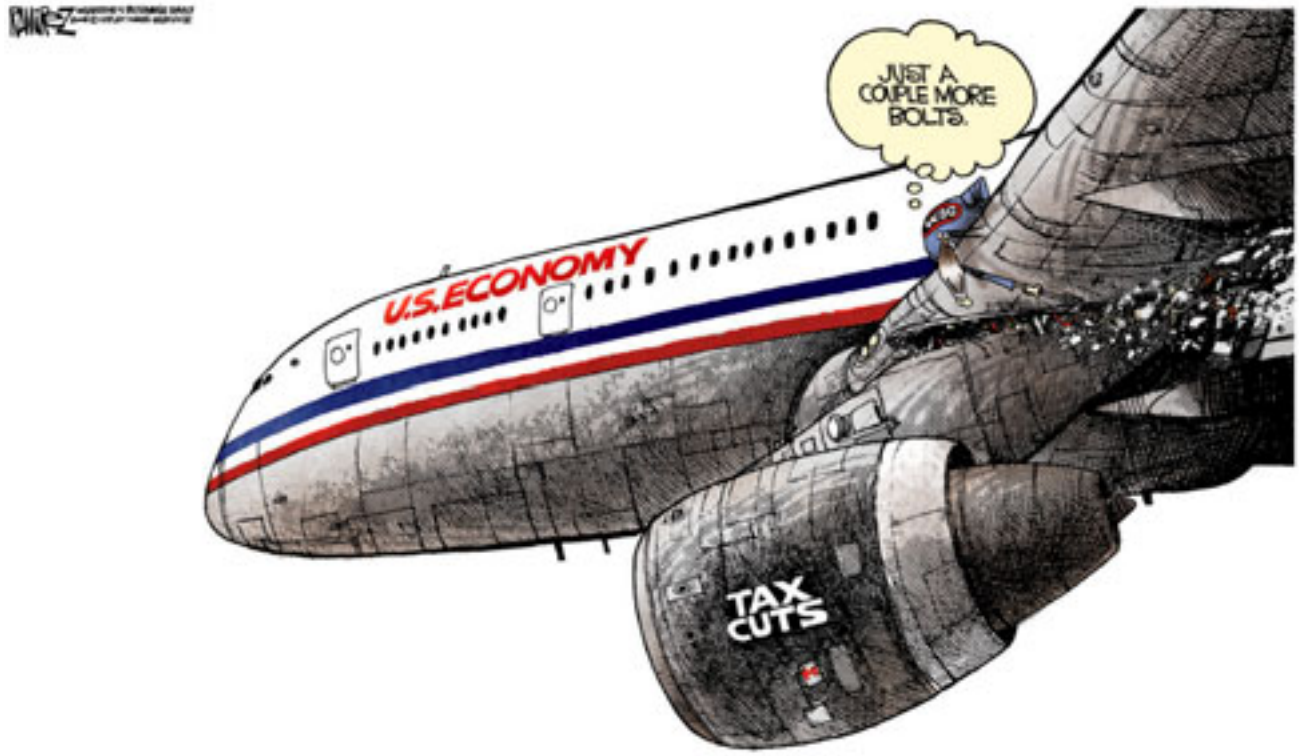
It's also largely unnecessary. One thing the Greenlining study does prove is that a lot of information about the demographic composition of foundations and grantees is out in the open already. "To determine if the grantee met Greenlining's definition of minority-led," write the authors of "Fairness in Philanthropy," "researchers conducted web-based and media searches to collect demographic data on staff members, boards of directors, charitable programs, and organizational missions of listed grantees." In other words they spent a lot of time trolling the web checking out the color of people's skin. And they did so at a time when those organizations were not required by California state law to disclose such information on an annual basis. It is true that they occasionally ran into trouble: "If an organization did not have a website," the report states, "researchers called the organization to gather information about the ethnic makeup of board and staff members."

Now, "in some cases, this information was not available," the authors of "Fairness in Philanthropy" disclose—in those cases, it should be noted, where foundations and their grantees didn't find any particular reason to share their demographic makeup with others. So AB 624 properly should be understood as an attempt to make easier the work of outfits like the Greenlining Institute.

And that is yet another reason to oppose the bill. No one should want to make the lives of racial mau-mauers any easier. What AB 624 won't make any easier is charitable giving in California. The Washington, D.C.-based Philanthropy Roundtable, along with former Stanford law dean and NAACP lawyer Paul Brest, oppose the bill on the grounds that it will actually drive foundations out of the Golden State, as donors who do not want to expose grantees to the onerous reporting burden spend their money elsewhere. And how will California's minorities—and Californians generally—be served by that?

The logical response to donor flight is, of course, to nationalize disclosure requirements. Indeed, the Greenlining Institute aims to do exactly that; we hear the next targets likely will be New York and Illinois, and that Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee are interested. If AB 624 becomes law, then, California once again will be the place where America's political future happens. Except that such a future—where an entire sector of the economy is brought under the purview of diversity bean-counters—is a place where we don't want to live. If it reaches his desk, Governor Schwarzenegger should veto this bill.

*—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors*




MICHAEL RAMIREZ



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# A balanced energy approach

**As Americans talk** about our energy future, the conversation naturally turns to the need for future supplies to sustain a growing American economy. The federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) projects that even with a significant increase in energy efficiency and alternatives, Americans will still use 25 million barrels of oil a day in 2030 – a 21 percent increase from today.

Where will we get that oil? We need to have a balanced energy approach. We should look first here at home. The government estimates some 30 billion barrels of undiscovered, technically recoverable oil are available on federal lands currently closed to development. That's more than enough oil to power 32 million cars and heat 18 million homes for 30 years. America's oil and natural gas industry stands ready to make the multi-billion dollar investments needed to tap these new supplies – if federal policies allow it.

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# The Magical Democrat

## Enchanted by Obama.

**BY DEAN BARNETT**

To understand Barack Obama's campaign, it's instructive to look back at the last contender to enrapture the left's grassroots, Howard Dean. In a December 2003 report, the *New York Times Magazine* explored the personal dimension of the Deanmania sweeping the Democratic party.

The story began with the sad tale of Clay Johnson:

> Last February, Clay Johnson, 26, took a trip from Atlanta to the Dominican Republic to visit his girlfriend, Merrill, who was studying linguistics at a university there. He carried an engagement ring in his pocket, but when he arrived, he said, Merrill was cold and distant, and he never gave it to her. Before he left, Merrill told him that she didn't love him anymore. He returned to his apartment in Atlanta, [which] was also serving as a storage space for Merrill's possessions . . . and as a temporary home for her two cats. He was allergic to the cats. He stripped to his underwear, lay on the floor in a fetal position and remained there for days, occasionally sipping from an old carton of orange juice. . . . Johnson's friends kept calling, trying to think of something that would get him out of the house. Finally they hit on one: Howard Dean.

To make a long story short, Johnson eventually arose from the fetal position, put some clothes on, and got a job working for the Dean campaign. Not only that, he found a new girl who struck his fancy and who shared his passion for the Vermont governor. The *Times* does not report whether she too eventually left Johnson curled up in a ball.

The point of repeating this anecdote isn't to indulge in some belated mockery of the Dean campaign, although such mockery always makes for fine sport. The point is that for a while now, at least since the Iraq war turned into a long slog, there have been legions of liberals anxious to pin their hopes on a new savior, who would get the world spinning on its proper axis again. In 2003, Howard Dean, for reasons we still can't fully comprehend, served as the emotional life preserver for the hopeless left. He was the Magical Democrat who just by dint of his presence in the Oval Office would right the world's wrongs.

In 2008, the far more plausible (not to mention electable) Barack Obama has assumed the role of the Magical Democrat.

After his Super Tuesday victories, Obama delivered one of his more stirring speeches. Unlike Hillary Clinton, who delivers such set-pieces flanked by musty relics from her husband's administration like Wesley Clark and Madeleine Albright, Obama speaks amidst a throng of enthusiastic young followers. The Fox News cameras that night made a point of focusing on one woman who was so overwhelmed by the candidate that her eyes repeatedly welled up. Meanwhile, radio host James Vicevich has compiled a growing list of swooning victims at Obama rallies. (A report from Madison, Wisconsin: "Before the senator arrived, students

PAUL MOYSE

*Dean Barnett is a* WEEKLY STANDARD *staff writer.*



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were tossing around an inflatable cow above the crowd. Three people fainted in the midst of all the enthusiasm.")

It makes one feel like a killjoy to point out that Barack Obama is merely a man, and a politician at that. At the risk of being even more of a sourpuss, one can note that, in spite of the meaning he's already giving to so many people's lives, Obama is a thoroughly conventional liberal. At least when Bill Clinton ran, he did so promising a number of things that weren't in the traditional Democrat's bailiwick. Aside from a very occasional, very tepid suggestion that teachers' unions may be fallible, Obama resides firmly within the Democratic mainstream on every major issue.

Nevertheless, there's something about him that encourages his supporters to consider the impossible achievable. People don't weep in his presence because they have heard the details of his health care prescriptions and concur with his proposals. Obama's success has relied on his campaign occupying a higher plane, a place of hopes realized and dreams come true.

The only problem with being the Magical Democrat is that most elections end up focusing on issues; Obama then may look smaller than he does now. It is harder to strike a pose as a world-historical figure when quibbling over the top marginal income tax rate.

The challenge for Republicans, specifically John McCain, will be to conduct the general election in the real world of limited government and dangerous foreign malefactors rather than in the Obama fantasy world. The good news for McCain is that he has far more experience dealing with the ugliness of the real world than Obama has, and can speak to our looming challenges with far more authenticity.

The bad news is that Obama's fantasy world is appealing, much more appealing than the real world. Obama's opponent will have to disenchant his followers. And in troubled times, many voters may be eager to curl up in the fetal position in a warm, safe place created by the most attractive Magical Democrat of them all. ♦

# Hey, Big Spenders

## Republicans' love-hate relationship with earmarks. BY SAMANTHA SAULT

Last week, the House Republican leadership chose Alabama representative Jo Bonner to fill an empty seat on the powerful Appropriations Committee. The seat opened up when Roger Wicker of Mississippi was appointed to the Senate in December to replace Trent Lott. Bonner was a favorite to win the slot: He is on good terms with the leadership and, like Wicker, represents a safe southern district. Bonner also has close ties to appropriators, having served as chief of staff to his predecessor Sonny Callahan, a long-time appropriator.

> The number of pork-barrel projects exploded in the mid-1990s, says Tom Schatz of Citizens Against Government Waste, because of 'the belief . . . that providing earmarks would help vulnerable Republicans get reelected.'

Appropriations seats are always sought-after, but this time as many as seven Republicans clamored for the prize. Contenders included vulnerable members like Washington's Dave Reichert; Tom Cole, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, who wanted to use the position to fundraise for vulnerable members; and the pork-busting firebrand from Arizona, Jeff Flake.

Flake is a fierce critic of "earmarking," the practice by which appropriators slip district-level "pork" projects into appropriations bills without a floor debate or vote. Many members of the Republican Study Committee, the House's caucus of fiscal conservatives, and conservative bloggers supported his bid. But even though Minority Leader John Boehner wants to reform earmarking—and House Republicans recently tried (and failed) to pass a House-wide earmark moratorium—Flake was considered a long shot for the seat. He has reportedly angered the leadership with his criticism of the appropriations process and Republican spending—criticism that has some justification, given recent history.

In 1995, when Republicans took control of Congress, they were full of promises of fiscal responsibility. Dick Armey, who became House majority leader that year, says they practiced spending restraint "with very serious rigor"—and discretionary spending decreased from $609.2 billion in 1995 to $581 billion in 1998 in constant dollars. But House Appropriations chairman Bob Livingston soon refused to work with the fiscal-restraint proponent Armey, who was in charge of floor scheduling. At that point, in Armey's telling, "discipline broke down," and discretionary spending began to rise. It hasn't stopped since. In 2006, total discretionary spending, adjusted for inflation, reached $823.5 billion.

The House wasn't the only culprit in the demise of Republican spending restraint. Other players included the Republican Senate (which some policy analysts say is even more extravagant than the House), a Democratic president, and a Republican president with spending initiatives of their own. Add to that the new homeland-security initiatives after

*Samantha Sault is an editorial assistant at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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9/11, two wars, Hurricane Katrina, and the allure of earmarks, and all attempts at spending restraint went out the door. In 2006, the party paid dearly at the polls.

Flake and his fellow fiscal conservatives say reining in spending begins with ending earmarks. As Senator Tom Coburn wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed two years ago, "Earmarks are a gateway drug on the road to the spending addiction. One day an otherwise frugal member votes for pork, the next day he or she votes for a bloated spending bill or entitlement expansion: A 'no' vote might cut off their access to earmarks."

Rep. Jeff Flake at an anti-earmark rally in October

Tom Schatz, president of the anti-pork group Citizens Against Government Waste, cites another reason why the number of pork-barrel projects exploded in the mid-1990s: "the belief . . . that providing earmarks would help vulnerable Republicans get reelected."

Particularly after 9/11, Armey notes, the House leadership—Speaker Dennis Hastert, Majority Leader Tom DeLay, and Appropriations chairman C.W. "Bill" Young of Florida—moved away from the 1994 principles and focused instead on keeping the majority. He says that appropriators "would go to the campaign committee and say, 'Who do we have that's in trouble, and what can we do for them?' And they'd say, 'Well, Congressman X is in trouble in Indiana, and what you can do is get him that bridge he's been working on.'" Armey concedes that "this enormous explosion really came from the leadership," although the appropriators were complicit and should have fought for more discipline.

Last year the House adopted a rule requiring members to disclose their earmarks. Nevertheless, members, especially appropriators, are earmarking as much as ever. Last week, Taxpayers for Common Sense (TCS) ranked Young and his successor, Jerry Lewis of California (now the committee's ranking member), as two of the top four House earmarkers in 2007, cashing in at $169 million and $137 million in Appropriations earmarks, respectively.

> Earmarks are 'only one percent of the budget,' says Flake, but they 'drive up spending everywhere else because you spend all your time earmarking,' leaving little time for oversight of entitlement spending, for example.

Although TCS calculates that earmarks have decreased 23 percent since 2005, 8 of the top 10 House earmarkers (and 9 of the top 10 Senate earmarkers) were appropriators. Flake, who does not request earmarks and would have been the only appropriator not to do so, says this is why the committee needs an anti-pork member: "That's the problem when we bring up earmarks. People turn around justifiably and say, 'Hey, look at the biggest abusers.'" And the cycle continues.

Still, House members agree that the problem with earmarks isn't necessarily the earmarks, but the time spent earmarking. Earmarks are "only 1 percent of the budget," says Flake, but they "drive up spending everywhere else because you spend all your time earmarking," leaving little time for oversight of entitlement spending, for example.

Rep. Jack Kingston of Georgia, an appropriator who supported Flake's bid for the seat, explains further: "If you eliminate an earmark, it does not drop spending. It just lets the money be un-earmarked, and then a bureaucrat makes the decision instead of an elected official." This makes earmarking "easier to justify," with the result that appropriators spend most of their time sizing up thousands of earmark requests instead of wrestling with more consequential appropriations issues.

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy at the Cato Institute, says that until the system is reformed, earmarking will go on unrestrained, "regardless of who is in power." Democrats are continuing the Republicans' policy of directing earmarks to vulnerable members. Steve Ellis, vice president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, says that by not appointing Flake to the committee, Republicans missed an opportunity to make a "strong statement" about earmark reform. Jo Bonner supported the moratorium—but his own earmarks totaled nearly $28 million this year.

Reform-minded policy analysts agree that Republicans should enact a unilateral earmark moratorium and appoint Flake-types to the Appropriations committee in 2009, when six Republican members will retire. For now, though, Republicans will continue to pork it up at least until Election Day. ♦

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# The Beagle Has Landed

## Triumph of the underdog.

**BY PHIL TERZIAN**

Along with ballroom dancers and Civil War re-enactors, dog show aficionados constitute an interesting subculture in American life. Beyond that brief description, I am disinclined to go—except, perhaps, to recommend the exceedingly amusing *Best in Show* (2000), the Christopher Guest "mockumentary" that offers an affectionate glimpse into the rarefied world of purebred breeds, their owners, trainers, judges, and admirers.

Once a year, however, and only for an instant, dog shows are news in the larger culture, when New York's Westminster Kennel Club holds its competition at Madison Square Garden. It's a genuine tradition: The Westminster show has been held annually since 1877, and "Best in Show" has been awarded to one fortunate purebred each year since 1907. The scene, nationally televised, is now familiar: the Garden filled to the rafters with fans, in evening dress clutching high-priced tickets, while ladies and gentlemen parade their dogs, and judges squeeze testicles and fold back ears for close inspection (of the dogs).

*Philip Terzian is literary editor of* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

It is, perhaps, a little unfair, but over the decades the Westminster show has tended to conform to stereotype. There is a preponderance of well-bred, well-fed female owners and trainers, and exquisitely groomed male handlers, and the lucky dogs chosen for Best in Show have had a tendency to resemble the humans surrounding them. Needless to say, certain breeds—particularly of the delicate, long-haired, extravagantly barbered classes—have dominated the proceedings, and with wearisome regularity.

*Uno and his trophy at the Westminster show*

UPI PHOTO / JOHN ANGELILLO

That is, until last week. On February 11, a fetching 15-inch male beagle from Columbia, S.C., named Uno won the competition within the hound class, and all hell broke loose, for this was the first time a beagle had won in its category since 1939. This is not to say that Uno's path to final victory was clear—the last year a hound won Best in Show was 1983—but it did suggest that, in the purebred world as in the Democratic party, change was in the air. And in the 24 hours between Uno's emergence and final judging, the story exploded on the wires and cable TV, clogged the web, and generated national interest in the Westminster show beyond all experience.

By now, of course, readers are aware that, on the evening of February 12, Uno prevailed. Against a final field of competitors that included not one, but two specimens of sculpted poodle, the beagle was awarded Best in Show to the evident delight of the audience. When the finalists were called upon to prance around the ring, the cheers for Uno were conspicuously louder; and when he won, the spectators roared and stood in ovation.

Considerably more TV viewers tuned in to Westminster this year, Uno has been making the rounds of the chat shows, the Internet is still pulsing with excitement, and hundreds of rapturous comments are posted on the YouTube.com video of Uno's triumph.

Why? There are two or three possibilities. The first, and most prosaic, may be that the judge for the final round was J. Donald Jones of Marietta, Ga., a retired Emory psychologist and dog fancier whose elderly demeanor and port-wine southern accent suggested someone who had



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grown up with hounds, and retained happy memories. From an anthropological standpoint, past (female) judges had visibly recoiled from hounds—beagles, bassets, harriers, and foxhounds especially—but Dr. Jones seemed quite taken with Uno.

"He's the most perfect beagle I've ever seen," he said at a news conference. "Look at his face, you melt right away." Uno bayed more than once as Jones looked him over—a swift disqualification in most instances, but endearing this time.

Another, more cynical, reason might be that the Westminster powers-that-be had calculated that yet another maltese or miniature schnauzer or shih tzu was not likely to awaken the slumbering masses, and that some sort of revolutionary gesture—a beagle!—might be necessary. It's an interesting theory, and if true, seems to have worked; but it would have required collusion and deception by Dr. Jones, which seems unthinkable.

No, the only plausible explanation is the obvious one: After 132 years, the venerable Westminster Kennel Club came to its senses, and recognized the beagle as the extraordinary creature that it is. Uno, who is nothing if not typical, is the lucky beneficiary of this great awakening.

This is not the first time that the virtues of what Uno's handler calls the "merry little hound" have been extolled in these pages. On May 30, 2005, describing my years of beagling in the northern Virginia countryside, this author wrote of the "ears flapping, tails wagging, and singing in the unmistakable baying voice of the hound that is music to a countryman's ears." It is no accident that Uno's recognition triggered a joyful response among his fellow citizens, arising from somewhere deep within the national consciousness. From Snoopy of *Peanuts* to LBJ's White House pack to last year's sleeper *Underdog* ($43.7 million box office revenue) beagles—in all their tri-colored, flop-eared, sad-eyed, short-haired, musically-voiced glory—are, for one year at least, America's dog. ♦

# Sharia Comes for the Archbishop

## Rowan Williams misunderstands Islam.

**BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ**

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, head of the Anglican Communion, doubtless thought he was making a positive contribution to interfaith relations when he gave a speech on February 7 suggesting that some form of official recognition in Britain for elements of *sharia*—Islamic religious law—is "unavoidable." But his remarks were shocking to many of his flock. Only four days later, Archbishop Williams, insisting he'd been misunderstood, blamed "our current style of electronic global communication" for the ensuing uproar. He refused to retract what he had said.

Britons—some 3 percent of whom are Muslims—were disturbed by more than Williams's naiveté. Many Muslim immigrants came to the West to escape the excesses of Islamic ideology in countries like Pakistan, where extremism is advancing. Imposition of *sharia* could deny these immigrants' children opportunities to become successful in British society or elsewhere in the West.

What the archbishop ignored is that British Muslim radicals raise the demand for *sharia* as an ideological banner. They hope to separate Muslims from their non-Muslim neighbors, the easier to recruit and indoctrinate believers for jihadism. George Carey, Rowan Williams's predecessor as archbishop of Canterbury, warned in the *Sunday Telegraph* of February 10 that *sharia* might perpetuate Muslim ghettoes in Britain.

*Stephen Schwartz is the author of* The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony, *due out in September from Doubleday.*

But *sharia* is not a sound-bite topic. Paradoxically, ignorance of *sharia* among non-Muslims is matched by a similar void among the radical agitators, who chiefly seek publicity with their demands and threats. Unschooled in Islamic law, they equate *sharia* with their own improvised notions of religious justice. In reality, *sharia* is a complex system of jurisprudence, differently applied by four different Sunni and two Shia schools of interpretation.

One aspect of *sharia* governs religious customs that are not normally the subject of public law in the West—things like diet, prayer, burial, and *zakat*, the obligatory contribution for relief of the poor. Non-Muslims need not be concerned about, say, clerical supervision of the slaughtering of meat. In this limited sense, *sharia* already functions on a voluntary basis in Britain and wherever Muslims live, and poses no threat to Western legal systems.

Indeed, under British and American protections for the free exercise of religion, some religious believers are already granted exemptions for certain principles and practices of their faith so long as they do not interfere with the good order of society (Sikh policemen in Britain may wear turbans, conscientious objectors to war or abortion are not required to participate in those acts, and so on).

Further, a "shadow *sharia*" already exists in Britain: informal courts, usually handling family matters or alleged apostasy, that impose forcible marriage and divorce. But *sharia* fanatics call for something more: They want the public enforcement of religious decrees. Obligatory *sharia*



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for Muslims, enforced by the British state, is the ultimate threat implicit in Archbishop Williams's call for accommodation.

Counterintuitive as it may seem, the Islamists' call for introduction of Islamic religious law in the West is an innovation, not heard in Europe or the United States before the radicalization of Muslims at the end of the 1970s. This is because it is actually a *violation* of traditional *sharia*, which commands that Muslims living in non-Muslim lands obey the law and respect the customs of the host countries. This requirement is spelled out, for instance, in the *sharia* volume *A Code of Practice for Muslims in the West* (1999), which quotes the moderate Iraqi Shia ayatollah Ali Sistani pronouncing that Muslims living in non-Muslim nations must commit themselves "to abide by the laws of that country," as they implicitly promise to do when they sign an immigration form. If they cannot do this, they should return to Muslim territory.

**Rowan Williams**

GARY LOCKE

Traditional *sharia* also forbids antagonizing the local majority in non-Muslim societies. Through most of Islamic history, jihad against non-Muslims referred to warfare between states and armies, not infiltration and conspiracy. For normal Muslims, there is a duty to protect one's family and community by showing a good civic example to non-Muslims.

Many great Islamic polities—including the Ottoman empire, the most powerful Muslim state in history—refused to grant primacy of *sharia* over common law. The Turks maintained a legal standard, *kanun*, for administration of government, taxation, and related affairs and left *sharia* to family and religious matters. Exclusive authority for *sharia* is an Arab and Pakistani fixation, occasionally sprouting in the margins of the Islamic global community—in parts of Nigeria, northern Malaysia, and the Muslim diaspora in the West.

Family law is the most controversial aspect of *sharia*, because radical Muslim concepts of modesty, and traditional regulation of marriage and divorce, violate Western canons on women's equality. Many Muslim clerics in Western Europe acquiesce in, and offer mendacious legal interpretations to support, such offenses as wife-beating, polygamy, female genital mutilation, honor killings, forced marriage, forced divorce, and the Saudi practice of "tourist marriage." (Late last year, the Saudi daily *al-Watan* claimed that Saudis have spent $25 million over the past three years on this scam, in which Saudi men on vacation deceptively marry local women for a summer, then divorce them before returning to the kingdom. Some of this behavior is derived from local cultures, but it has been assimilated by Islamist ideology.)

In practice, government recognition of the jurisdiction of *sharia* courts over matters of common law in the West would mean either *sharia* on the cheap dominated by ignorant radicals depriving British Muslims of their due rights—or an extremely elaborate system making room for the six main schools of Islamic jurisprudence, providing for an administrative apparatus, certification of judges, appeals, and so on, creating a major burden on the public budget. *Sharia* as a basis for strictly voluntary mediation of family or business disputes might sound well and good, except for the likely appointment of radicals as arbiters.

Archbishop Williams failed to see that demands for *sharia* in the West have little to do with increased respect for Islam and everything to do with the continuing radicalization of Muslims. His lightminded remarks aggravate, rather than diminish, the growing tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain, the West's main center for expansion of radical Islam. ♦



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# Remember Those Benchmarks?

## Unheralded political progress in Iraq.

**BY FRED BARNES**

A year ago, when neither the war nor political reconciliation was going well, the Bush administration reluctantly agreed to 18 benchmarks for judging progress in Iraq. And the Democratic Congress eagerly wrote the benchmarks into law, also requiring the administration to report back in July and September on whether the benchmarks were being met.

Despite the surge of additional American troops and a new counter-insurgency strategy, the reports found little progress on the political benchmarks requiring tangible steps toward reconciliation between Shia and Sunnis. Democrats insisted this meant the surge had failed.

They had a point, but not anymore. The surge, by quelling violence and providing security, was supposed to produce "breathing space" in which reconciliation could take place. Now it has, not because President Bush says so, but based on those same benchmarks that Democrats once claimed were measures of failure in Iraq.

Last week, the Iraqi parliament passed three laws that amounted to a political surge to achieve reconciliation. Taken together, the laws are likely to bring minority Sunnis fully into the political process they had earlier boycotted and to produce a new class of political leaders.

Just as important is what the laws reflect in Iraq today. "The whole motivating factor" behind the legislation was "reconciliation, not retribution," says American ambassador Ryan Crocker, who has never sugarcoated the impediments to progress in Iraq. This is "remarkably different" from six months ago, he said.

The Iraqi government had made progress on nine of the 18 benchmarks before last week. But these were the easier ones, like forming a constitutional review committee or establishing security stations in Baghdad with American and Iraqi soldiers. The new laws deal with the harder, more divisive issues.

The most controversial—and the toughest to enact—gives significant power to provincial councils and mandates new provincial elections by October 1. As a result, leaders of the so-called Sunni Awakening who have broken with al Qaeda and insurgents are all but certain to gain power. And Iraq will have a decentralized, federal system of government.

In assessing progress last fall, the administration conceded the Iraqis had "not made significant progress" on achieving the benchmark on provincial powers. Now they have.

Next in importance to reconciliation is an amnesty law under which thousands of jailed Sunnis who haven't been charged with a crime will be released. Months ago, the administration said "the prerequisites for a successful general amnesty are not present." But the surge changed that by reducing violence and creating the conditions for amnesty.

If they wish, Democrats can cite the failure of the Iraqi parliament to pass a "hydrocarbons" law to codify the sharing of oil revenues among the Shia, Sunnis, and Kurds. And that law is still needed, particularly to provide a framework for managing the oil sector of the Iraqi economy.

In effect, however, the Iraqis are now sharing oil revenues through the $48 billion budget they passed. Ten billion dollars is to be distributed to the provinces without any sectarian bias. By the way, the vast majority of the $48 billion came from oil production.

A few weeks ago, the Iraqi government dealt with still another benchmark involving reconciliation. It called for "enacting and implementing a de-Baathification reform" to allow thousands of bureaucrats and officials in Saddam Hussein's regime to regain their jobs. Last fall, the Iraqis had "not made satisfactory progress" on this reform.

The new law has been criticized as too complicated. It may be as likely to force former Baathists—Sunnis mostly—out of jobs as it is to provide them with job opportunities. Crocker said the law will have to be straightened out by the executive council of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, the president (a Kurd), and two vice presidents (Shia and Sunni). "They're approaching it from a spirit of reconciliation," he said. We'll see.

When the second benchmarks report was released last September, Democrats jumped on it. Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid said the report "shows the president's flawed escalation policy is not working." According to Democratic senator Joe Biden of Delaware, "all it does is point out the failure." Democratic senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island said the Iraqi government "is not making progress . . . with respect to these benchmarks."

Now, the facts on the ground have changed dramatically, and so has progress on the benchmarks. Will Democrats acknowledge this? Or will they continue to claim the surge has failed and demand rapid withdrawal of our troops? So far, Democrats have reacted with silence.

"Facts are stubborn," Hillary Clinton said last month, "and I know it's sometimes hard to keep track of facts. But facts matter." Indeed they do. But with Democrats, the warning of former Harvard dean Henry Rosovsky may apply. "Never underestimate the difficulty," he said, "of changing false beliefs by facts." ♦

*Fred Barnes is executive editor of* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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# Six Parties, Zero Progress

## Only the State Department pretends things are going well with North Korea. BY DAN BLUMENTHAL

The State Department is engaged in heavy-duty spin to keep alive the clearly failing Six Party Talks on North Korean disarmament. But no amount of spin can hide the fact that whoever becomes president in 2009 will face a North Korean problem worse than that which Bill Clinton bequeathed to George W. Bush.

Last week, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Christopher Hill, State's top Asia diplomat, had to explain away the fact that Pyongyang has missed its deadline for fully declaring all of its nuclear weapons programs. Even more difficult was fudging the very open question of continuing North Korean proliferation.

Just the day before, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell testified that the intelligence community has "moderate confidence"—intelligence speak for "we have evidence"—that North Korea has an ongoing uranium enrichment program. McConnell further assessed that Pyongyang has produced enough plutonium for up to half a dozen nuclear weapons, and has the ballistic missile capability to hit the continental United States with those weapons. In short, notwithstanding State Department spin, North Korea has nuclear weapons and the ability to use them against the United States and her allies. There is little prospect that current U.S. policy will change North Korea's nuclear status.

Then there is the subject of proliferation. U.N. Security Council resolutions, Six Party Talk agreements, and U.S. warnings are supposed to prevent Pyongyang from proliferating *any* weapons of mass destruction or ballistic missile technology. But it seems pretty clear that when Israel struck a site in Syria in September 2007, it was because North Korea was helping ramp up a Syrian WMD program of some sort. All Hill had to say to Congress on this matter was that the State Department takes the issue of North Korean proliferation seriously—diplomatic talk meaning we're not planning to do anything about it.

> Whoever becomes president in 2009 will face a North Korean problem worse than that which Bill Clinton bequeathed to Bush.

The real state of play, then, is that North Korea will not fully declare, much less disable or dismantle, its nuclear weapons programs, and it has continued to proliferate. To mask this noncompliance, the State Department will talk optimistically of the next phases of diplomacy, continuing to provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil, removing it from the list of state sponsors of terror, even negotiating a peace treaty and full normalization. In short, no amount of evidence of North Korea's bad intentions will deter the Bush administration from declaring diplomatic victory.

This policy collapse on North Korea has happened at a rapid clip. It was just a year and a half ago that Bush told an audience in Singapore that we would "hold North Korea fully accountable for the consequences of such actions" if it shared WMD technology. If Pyongyang was not helping Syria with a WMD program, then the administration should say so forthrightly to help save its faltering policy.

After North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear tests in 2006, the administration got tough, with two strong U.N. resolutions and financial sanctions that hurt Kim and his cronies directly. President Bush then decided to give the regime he loathes one last chance to come clean, after decades of lying and cheating. Assistant Secretary Hill got it exactly backwards when he told senators on February 6 that "we" have much work to do in getting Pyongyang to rid itself of its nuclear programs. The burden is on Pyongyang to come clean. "We," meaning Washington (plus Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, and Moscow), must verify that they have done so and punish them if they have not.

Besides creating a more dangerous Korean peninsula, the Six Party process has caused a breach with our most important ally, Japan, which wanted to take a tougher line. What's more, China is making its own plans and arrangements to deal with an unstable and nuclear North Korea. Beijing, too, has little faith in the talks and has drawn up military plans to intervene in North Korea to protect its own interests. All parties are concerned about China's intentions, which they are keeping to themselves. If North Korea does collapse, American, Japanese, and South Korean war planners will have to consider the possibility of dealing with a unilateral Chinese intervention. China's trade with the North tripled between 2000 and 2005—with an eye toward gaining more influence over the future disposition of the peninsula.

The Six Party Talks, supposedly a model of multilateral diplomacy, have thus caused each party to act more unilaterally. Washington is essentially conducting its own negotiations with Pyongyang. Japan, a little less confident of U.S. protection, is showing a keener interest in

*Dan Blumenthal is a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and former senior director for China and Taiwan in the office of the secretary of defense.*



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having its own military capabilities to defend against North Korean missiles. And China is taking military and economic measures of its own to live with or perhaps even control an unstable, nuclear regime on its borders. The situation is, in short, more precarious than when this new round of diplomacy began.

President Bush, who has shown a remarkable steadfastness on Iraq, keen not to bequeath a Middle East disaster to his successor, still has an opportunity to change course in Korea. South Korea's new president, Lee Myung-bak, seems willing to be less conciliatory to Kim Jong Il and repair relations with Japan and Washington. South Korea has little interest in seeing a Chinese satellite state to its north. But Lee is getting mixed messages from Washington. He can't take a tougher line if Washington sticks to its "agreement at any price" course.

Rather than tying the hands of the next president, President Bush could start taking a more realistic approach to North Korea. First, Washington can halt its economic largesse until North Korea makes a full, and verifiable, declaration of its nuclear programs. Any talk of de-listing North Korea as a terrorist state or of normalizing relations is inappropriate given North Korea's continued bad behavior. Second, the Bush administration should tell the truth about North Korea's proliferation. If Pyongyang proliferated, it is time to once again sanction, squeeze, isolate, and perhaps even quarantine it. Third, the administration should focus its time and energy on building a common approach with South Korea and Japan. Washington shares with its democratic allies an interest in a democratic, unified peninsula. All three parties should ramp up efforts to take in the refugees still pouring out of North Korea.

The prospect of real change in North Korea under Kim is next to zero. All three countries should thus reestablish a strong deterrent posture that will be necessary as they work toward the only real, albeit long term, solution: a unified Korea free of Kim Jong Il and his ilk. ♦

# Unintelligence on Iranian Nukes

## Appalling political gamesmanship at the CIA.

**BY MICHAEL RUBIN**

During his February 5 testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell backpedaled from the December 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) and its claim that, "in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program."

Not only did McConnell testify that the Islamic Republic was working to master the enrichment of uranium—"the most difficult challenge in nuclear production"—but he also acknowledged that, "because of intelligence gaps," the U.S. government could not be certain that the Iranian government had fully suspended its covert nuclear programs. "We assess with high confidence that Iran has the scientific, technical, and industrial capacity eventually to produce nuclear weapons," he testified. "In our judgment, only an Iranian political decision to abandon a nuclear weapons objective would plausibly keep Iran from eventually producing nuclear weapons—and such a decision is inherently reversible."

The NIE was no accident, and McConnell's pirouette does more than confirm the intelligence community's sloppiness. The 2007 NIE was built on geopolitical assumptions as much as any hard intelligence, and historians will deem it important not because it was accurate, but because it made utterly clear the collapse of the intelligence community. While the crudeness of its assault on the president's Iran policy makes it the best example of the intelligence community's agenda politics, it is far from the only one.

*Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was an Iran country director at the Pentagon between September 2002 and April 2004.*

My initiation into CIA policy plays came less than a week after Baghdad's fall to coalition forces in April 2003. In the months before the war, U.S. government officials had assessed thousands of Iraqi political activists and technocrats in order to prepare to fill the Iraqi political vacuum. Representatives from State, the Pentagon, and the National Security Council were meeting to vet invitations for the Nasiriya Conference where Iraqis would discuss post-liberation governance.

Rather than simply present the biographies of the various Iraqi figures, the CIA sought to be a privileged policy player. Its representative announced that not only would Langley be inviting its own candidates outside the interagency consensus, but the CIA would not be sharing the names or backgrounds of its invitees. Putting aside the ridiculousness of the CIA belief that it could invite delegates anonymously to a public conference, more troubling was the principle. Far from limiting its work to intelligence, the CIA leadership was unabashedly involving itself in major policy initiatives.

The reverberations of Langley's policy games haunted reconstruction. CIA officials would promise governorships to Iraqis without any coordination. Often, diplomats, military officials, and Pentagon civilians would learn of such deals only after other Iraqis had been appointed or elected to such offices. (Some U.S. service-



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men surely paid the price as spurned Iraqis responded to what they saw as betrayal.) Once the son of a Kurdish leader remarked how ridiculous State-Defense bickering was when the CIA had implemented and funded a decision on the policy issue months before without any coordination whatsoever.

Many of the agency's senior analysts are arrogant after years behind their computers, believing they know far better what U.S. policy should be than the policymakers for whom they draft reports. The recourse of the disgruntled, bored, or politicized analyst is the leak—the bread and butter of any national security correspondent. Journalists who fulfill the leakers' objectives win ever more tantalizing scoops; those who maintain professional integrity and question the agenda behind any leak, find their access cut. The result is a situation in which journalists who might otherwise double-check sources, take a single intelligence analyst at his word, even if he is using them to fight a policy battle.

Iraq again provides a case study. In order to shield themselves from accountability over flawed intelligence or to bolster their Iraqi proxies at the expense of competitors, CIA officials provided a steady stream of leaks to favored correspondents like the *New Yorker*'s Seymour Hersh or McClatchy's Warren Strobel. Such leaks ranged from allegations that the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans—a policy shop—was a rogue intelligence operation to misattributions of the provenance of prewar intelligence.

It was not uncommon, for example, to see false or exaggerated intelligence attributed to the Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmad Chalabi when it had actually come from Kurdish officials. This was never more clear than in a July 17, 2004, *New York Times* correction. The paper was retracting three stories which alleged a connection between Chalabi and an Iraqi source code-named Curveball, whose information later turned out to be bogus. The editors explained that their correspondent had "attribute[d] that account to American intelligence officials who spoke on condition of anonymity." They continued: "Those officials now say that there was no such established relationship." In other words, intelligence officials lied to a reporter to achieve a policy aim.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA / GETTY IMAGES

*Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell*

Such behavior is not limited to debates over policies impacting countries thousands of miles away. W. Patrick Lang, a former Defense Intelligence Agency official, told the *American Prospect* in 2005 that his intelligence community colleagues used leaks to try to influence the 2004 presidential election. "Of course they were leaking. They told me about it at the time. They thought it was funny. They'd say things like, 'This last thing that came out, surely people will pay attention to that. They won't reelect this man.'" The intelligence leadership did not refer the matter to the judiciary, unlike the leak concerning Valerie Plame.

To deflect criticism of the NIE, intelligence officials reached out to reporters. "Hundreds of officials were involved and thousands of documents were drawn upon in this report . . . making it impossible for any official to overly sway it," the *Wall Street Journal* was told. Wayne White, a former analyst in State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, suggested it was "absolutely disgusting" that anyone could impugn the professionalism of lead author (and his former colleague) Thomas Fingar. This is disingenuous. Personnel are policy. Half of Washington's battles involve who writes the first and last drafts of any paper or memo.

McConnell's testimony undercut the idea that the intelligence agencies deserve a reputation for either professionalism or integrity. A tolerance for political gamesmanship has besmirched the entire community. With the NIE giving Iran what President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad declared its "greatest victory during the past 100 years," the consequence for U.S. national security is grave.

In the wake of the Iraq war, many Democrats accused the Bush administration of politicizing intelligence. It was a false charge, but good politics. But the fact is, the problem was the opposite: an intelligence community driven by the desire to conduct policy. ♦



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# Death by Car Bomb in Damascus

*A founding father of Islamic terrorism gets his just deserts*

**By Thomas Joscelyn**

Late Tuesday night in Damascus, Imad Mugniyah, senior terrorist of Hezbollah, was killed in a car bomb explosion. It was a fitting death for a founding father of Islamic terrorism, a man who himself had built many bombs. If you had not heard of Mugniyah before, there is a good reason. Terror chieftains like Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri seek the limelight with their frequent and widely disseminated diatribes. Not Mugniyah. Until recently, only a handful of photos of him were publicly available, and he never gave interviews. Instead, he was something of a ghost, confined to the terrorist underworld since the early 1980s, quietly doing the bidding of his masters, the Assad family in Syria and the mullahs in Iran.

Mugniyah, however, was well known in counterterrorism circles. His role in the kidnapping and torture death of William Buckley, CIA station chief in Beirut in 1984, had earned him special enmity. Indeed, law enforcement and intelligence agencies around the globe hunted Mugniyah for nearly 30 years. But until last week he always escaped, leaving behind him a bloody trail. Finally, someone—we cannot be sure who, as of this writing—got him.

**VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN TO THE PUBLIC, IMAD MUGNIYAH WAS WELL KNOWN IN COUNTERTERRORISM CIRCLES. INDEED, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AROUND THE GLOBE HUNTED HIM FOR THE BETTER PART OF THREE DECADES.**

The assassination of Mugniyah has been widely reported in the press. Most accounts have gotten the details of his early career right. They have noted Mugniyah's role in some of the first Islamist terrorist attacks against the United States, including the bombings of the U.S. embassy and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983 and a series of hijackings and kidnappings throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. But what virtually all of the coverage in the major media in recent days omits is this: Imad Mugniyah was a vital ally of Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda.

Most accounts have ignored Mugniyah's ties to al Qaeda. Others have denied that collusion between the Shiite Mugniyah and the Sunni bin Laden was possible. One Associated Press account described Mugniyah as "a Shiite Muslim not known to be connected to the Sunni al Qaeda." James Risen of the *New York Times* mentioned in passing that "there is evidence of contacts between [Mugniyah and bin Laden]," including "at least one meeting in the 1990s, possibly to discuss a terrorist relationship." If it were left to the mainstream media, then, Mugniyah's role in the history of al Qaeda's terror would be only a vague matter for speculation.

A close reading of the 9/11 Commission Report, however, along with legal documents produced by the Clinton administration, the trial testimony of two known al Qaeda terrorists, and a variety of other sources, tells a different story. There is a lengthy history of collaboration between Mugniyah and al Qaeda. And there remain disturbing questions about his possible involvement in the attacks of September 11.

Imad Mugniyah's relationship with Osama bin Laden began in the early 1990s, when al Qaeda's CEO was living in Sudan. Bin Laden's benefactor at the time was a charismatic Sunni Islamist ideologue named Has-

*Thomas Joscelyn is a terrorism researcher, writer, and economist living in New York. He is the author, most recently, of* Iran's Proxy War Against America *(Claremont Institute).*



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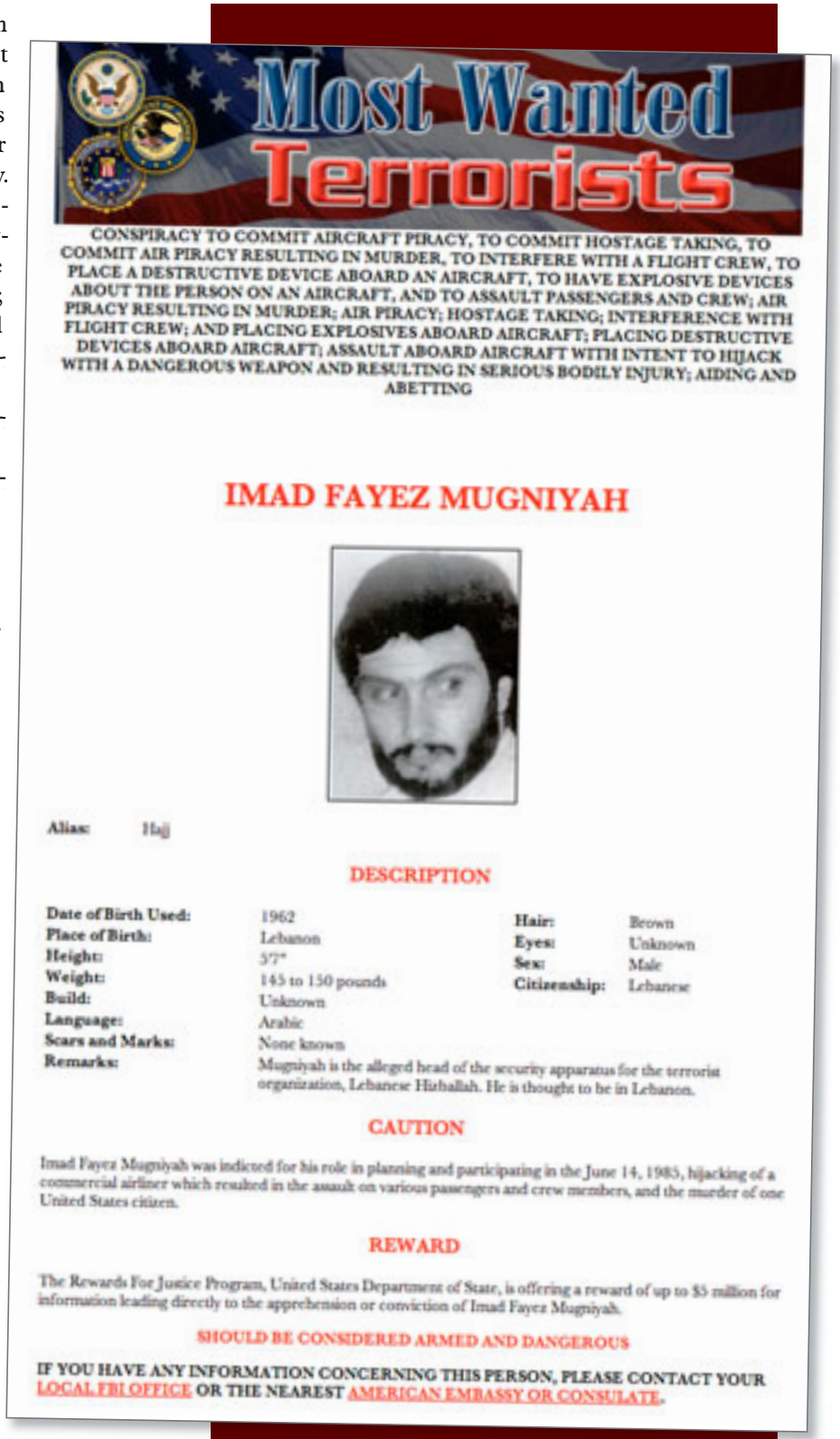
san al-Turabi. In 1989, Turabi, along with General Omar al-Bashir, now president of Sudan, orchestrated a coup in which Sudan's regime was overthrown. In its place, Bashir and Turabi installed their own National Islamic Front (NIF) party.

From the first, the NIF had radical designs for the world. The differences between Sunnis and Shiites were not insurmountable in Turabi's eyes; on multiple occasions he dismissed the importance of any theological disagreements. Instead, Turabi envisioned a grand, Manichean clash of civilizations in which the Muslim world stood united against its common Western foes, especially America. In a few short years, Turabi's Sudan became a hub for international terrorists of all stripes. A who's who of terrorists set up shop. And Turabi welcomed the leading state sponsors of terrorism as well. Scores of Iraqi and Iranian intelligence officers relocated to Sudan, and Turabi made sure they mingled with his other imported terrorists. As George Tenet would note in his autobiography, *At the Center of the Storm*, Turabi "reportedly served as a conduit for Bin Laden between Iraq and Iran."

With Turabi's help, bin Laden began meeting with senior Iranian and Hezbollah officials. Years later, during the trial in New York of those responsible for al Qaeda's August 7, 1998, embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, former al Qaeda operative Jamal al Fadl described one such meeting.

In an exchange with prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald on February 6, 2001, al Fadl explained that the Iranians talked about how "we have to come together and we have to forget the problem between each other and each one he should respect the other because our enemy is one and because there is no reason to fight each other." Fitzgerald followed up, "Who did they describe the enemy as being?" Fadl replied, "They say westerns [sic]."

Bin Laden agreed with the Iranian assessment that the enemies of the West should come together. Years after the



Most Wanted Terrorists

CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT AIRCRAFT PIRACY, TO COMMIT HOSTAGE TAKING, TO COMMIT AIR PIRACY RESULTING IN MURDER, TO INTERFERE WITH A FLIGHT CREW, TO PLACE A DESTRUCTIVE DEVICE ABOARD AN AIRCRAFT, TO HAVE EXPLOSIVE DEVICES ABOUT THE PERSON ON AN AIRCRAFT, AND TO ASSAULT PASSENGERS AND CREW; AIR PIRACY RESULTING IN MURDER; AIR PIRACY; HOSTAGE TAKING; INTERFERENCE WITH FLIGHT CREW; AND PLACING EXPLOSIVES ABOARD AIRCRAFT; PLACING DESTRUCTIVE DEVICES ABOARD AIRCRAFT; ASSAULT ABOARD AIRCRAFT WITH INTENT TO HIJACK WITH A DANGEROUS WEAPON AND RESULTING IN SERIOUS BODILY INJURY; AIDING AND ABETTING

IMAD FAYEZ MUGNIYAH

Alias: Hajj

DESCRIPTION

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date of Birth Used: | 1962 | Hair: | Brown |
| Place of Birth: | Lebanon | Eyes: | Unknown |
| Height: | 5'7" | Sex: | Male |
| Weight: | 145 to 150 pounds | Citizenship: | Lebanese |
| Build: | Unknown | | |
| Language: | Arabic | | |
| Scars and Marks: | None known | | |
| Remarks: | Mugniyah is the alleged head of the security apparatus for the terrorist organization, Lebanese Hizballah. He is thought to be in Lebanon. | | |

CAUTION

Imad Fayez Mugniyah was indicted for his role in planning and participating in the June 14, 1985, hijacking of a commercial airliner which resulted in the assault on various passengers and crew members, and the murder of one United States citizen.

REWARD

The Rewards For Justice Program, United States Department of State, is offering a reward of up to $5 million for information leading directly to the apprehension or conviction of Imad Fayez Mugniyah.

SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ARMED AND DANGEROUS

IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION CONCERNING THIS PERSON, PLEASE CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FBI OFFICE OR THE NEAREST AMERICAN EMBASSY OR CONSULATE.

**The U.S. government's wanted poster**

Balkis Press / ABACAPRESS.COM



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## A SAMPLING OF IMAD MUGNIYAH'S HANDIWORK THROUGH THE YEARS

Imad Mugniyah (undated photo)

**APRIL 1983:** Car bomb collapses American embassy in Beirut; 63 dead.

**OCTOBER 1983:** Truck bomb destroys Marine barracks in Beirut; 241 U.S. servicemen killed.

**1984:** Terrorists kidnap, torture, and murder CIA station chief in Lebanon, William Buckley.

**1995:** Truck bomb explodes outside the Egyptian embassy in Pakistan; 15 dead.

FROM LEFT: BALKIS PRESS / ABACAPRESS.COM; (BARRACKS, COPYRIGHT UNKNOWN); AFP PHOTO

meeting described by al Fadl, the Clinton administration recognized that an alliance between Iran, Hezbollah, and al Qaeda had blossomed in Sudan. In its 1998 indictment of al Qaeda, Clinton administration prosecutors charged that al Qaeda had

> forged alliances with the National Islamic Front in the Sudan and with representatives of the government of Iran, and its associated terrorist group Hezbollah, for the purpose of working together against their perceived common enemies in the West, particularly the United States.

At the heart of this "alliance" was the personal relationship between Mugniyah and bin Laden. As we shall see in a moment, we have the testimony of a top al Qaeda operative that the two men conferred in Sudan in the early 1990s. And there is evidence of their collaboration throughout the decade.

On November 19, 1995, an al Qaeda truck bomb hit the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan. According to Bob Baer, a long-time CIA agent who tracked Mugniyah for years, there is evidence that Mugniyah facilitated the travel of one of the al Qaeda operatives responsible for the attack. In *See No Evil*, Baer explains that shortly the attack American intelligence learned: "Mugniyah's deputy had provided a stolen Lebanese passport to one of the planners of the bombing." According to Baer, al Qaeda and Mugniyah stayed in contact afterwards as well. "Six months later," Baer says, "we found out that one of bin Laden's most dangerous associates was calling one of Mugniyah's offices in Beirut."

Then on June 25, 1996, the terrorists struck again. A truck bomb hit the Khobar Towers apartment complex in Saudi Arabia killing 19 American servicemen. There is no real dispute over Iran's and Hezbollah's role in the attack; both have been well documented. But contemporaneous analyses also pointed the finger at al Qaeda. Within weeks of the bombing, for example, the CIA produced a report titled "Khobar Bombing: Saudi Shia, Iran, and Usama Bin Ladin All Suspects." And the State Department's analysts produced a similar report of their own, noting that bin Laden's rhetoric raised the possibility that "he may have played a role."

Uncertainty over al Qaeda's involvement in the Khobar Towers bombing lingered for years. An investigation into the matter was left to the 9/11 Commission, which reported some new evidence but refrained from drawing any firm conclusions. "While the evidence of Iranian involvement is strong," the 9/11 Commission's final report reads, "there are also signs that al Qaeda played some role, as yet unknown." The Commission's Staff Statement No. 15 provided more details, calling the evidence of al Qaeda's involvement "strong but indirect." The Commission found that bin Laden appeared to have been plan-



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**1996:** Truck bomb hits Khobar Towers complex in Saudi Arabia; 19 American servicemen killed.

**1998:** Car bombs destroy U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; 224 killed.

FROM LEFT: AFP PHOTO / DOD; AFP PHOTO

ning a similar attack in the months prior to the Khobar bombing, and shortly after the strike he was congratulated by his fellow al Qaeda members. According to Lawrence Wright of the *New Yorker*, one of the al Qaeda members who called to congratulate bin Laden was Ayman al Zawahiri.

All of this was highly suggestive, but we may never know for sure whether or not the Khobar Towers bombing was a joint operation between al Qaeda and Hezbollah. It is clear, however, that Mugniyah's and bin Laden's tête-à-tête in Sudan had lasting effects.

**THE MARTYRDOM CULT THAT PLAGUES THE WORLD TODAY WAS MANIFEST IN MUGNIYAH'S EARLIEST ATTACKS IN BEIRUT IN 1983.**

Mugniyah's fingerprints on al Qaeda's terror can best be seen in the aforementioned August 7, 1998, embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Those al Qaeda strikes were directly modeled on Mugniyah's earliest attacks.

Hezbollah's bombing of the American embassy in Beirut on April 18, 1983, and its follow-on attack on the U.S. Marine barracks on October 23 were seminal events in the history of terrorism. They marked the first time Islamic suicide bombers had attacked significant American targets. Also, the strike on the Marine barracks coincided with a simultaneous attack on a headquarters for French paratroopers in Beirut. Al Qaeda has come to be known for coordinated suicide missions (e.g., the simultaneous bombings of U.S. embassies in two African nations in 1998 and the four simultaneous airplane hijackings on September 11, 2001). As terrorism expert Rohan Gunaratna explains in *Inside Al Qaeda*, al Qaeda took its inspiration for this modus operandi directly from Hezbollah. Before meeting Mugniyah, bin Laden and his agents did not have the expertise to carry out such attacks.

In response to the 1983 attacks in Beirut, America recoiled from the fight. Just months after Mugniyah's operatives had killed hundreds of American servicemen, America's forces were ordered out of wartorn Lebanon. This retreat left an indelible impression on the minds of many in the Middle East, including Osama bin Laden, then in his mid-twenties. Bin Laden has described America as a "weak horse," one that will flee any fight, and he is fond of citing the experience in Lebanon as proof of America's supposed weakness. Thus, bin Laden had powerful motives for seeking out Mugniyah, the mastermind behind the Beirut operations.



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That the two men met was made clear by Ali Mohamed, a top al Qaeda operative in the early 1990s, who testified at the embassy bombings trial that he had arranged a sit-down in Sudan between the aspiring jihadist bin Laden and Mugniyah. Mohamed explained:

> I was aware of certain contacts between al Qaeda and [Ayman al-Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad] organization, on one side, and Iran and Hezbollah on the other side. I arranged security for a meeting in the Sudan between Mugniyah, Hezbollah's chief, and bin Laden.

According to Mohamed, bin Laden was interested in forcing American troops out of Saudi Arabia the same way Mugniyah had forced them out of Lebanon. Mohamed said that Mugniyah agreed to help:

> Hezbollah provided explosives training for al Qaeda and [Egyptian Islamic Jihad]. Iran supplied Egyptian [Islamic] Jihad with weapons. Iran also used Hezbollah to supply explosives that were disguised to look like rocks.

The type of training described by Mohamed took place not only in Sudan, where hundreds of Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah operatives had built terrorist training camps, but also in Lebanon and Iran. The 9/11 Commission reported that "senior al Qaeda operatives and trainers traveled to Iran to receive training in explosives." Then, "in the fall of 1993, another such delegation went to the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon for further training in explosives as well as in intelligence and security." Among the al Qaeda trainees sent to the Bekaa Valley in 1993 were some of the perpetrators of the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. According to the 9/11 Commission, the al Qaeda delegation included "top military committee members and several operatives who were involved with the Kenya cell."

**'HEZBOLLAH PROVIDED EXPLOSIVES TRAINING FOR AL QAEDA AND [EGYPTIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD],' ONE-TIME TOP AL QAEDA OPERATIVE ALI MOHAMED TESTIFIED. 'IRAN SUPPLIED EGYPTIAN [ISLAMIC] JIHAD WITH WEAPONS. IRAN ALSO USED HEZBOLLAH TO SUPPLY EXPLOSIVES THAT WERE DISGUISED TO LOOK LIKE ROCKS.'**

Jamal al Fadl also told U.S. prosecutors that he had talked to one of his fellow al Qaeda terrorists about his training in Lebanon. Al Fadl said he was told the "training is very good" and his colleague brought "some tapes with him." Al Fadl elaborated: "I saw one of the tapes, and he tell me they train about how to explosives big buildings [sic]." Al Fadl went on to list the names of some of those who received Hezbollah's training. Saif al-Adel, who was promoted to the third-highest position inside al Qaeda shortly after the September 11 attacks, was among them. Al-Adel is still wanted by the FBI for his role in the embassy bombings. Today, he lives in Iran, under the protective custody of the mullahs.

Thus, with respect to al Qaeda's August 7, 1998, embassy bombings we know the following: The bombings were modeled on Mugniyah's earliest attacks. Mugniyah's Hezbollah trained some of the terrorists who executed the plot. And to this day Iran harbors one of the senior al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the attacks.

All this we know from the 9/11 Commission's report and the testimony of the terrorists themselves. Yet, some still insist that Mugniyah's Hezbollah and bin Laden's al Qaeda could not possibly work together.

Was Imad Mugniyah involved in the September 11 attacks? The truth is we do not know. We do know, however, that—as the 9/11 Commission concluded—the issue requires further investigation.

Just days before the publication of its final report, the 9/11 Commission made a startling discovery. The U.S. intelligence community had collected evidence, of which the Commission was previously unaware, demonstrating Iran's and Hezbollah's possible complicity in al Qaeda's terrorism. As described by 9/11 Commissioners Thomas Kean and Lee Hamilton in their book *Without Precedent*, the evidence included "connections between al Qaeda, Iran and the 9/11 hijackers."

Because this discovery came at the last minute, the Commission could not fully investigate the leads or give them appropriate prominence in the report. Nonetheless, the Commission reported some of the findings in a section provocatively titled "Assistance from Hezbollah and Iran to al Qaeda." The evidence demonstrated that "8 to 10 of the 14 Saudi 'muscle' operatives traveled into or out of Iran between October 2000 and February 2001." Not only did these hijackers use Iran as a transit hub, but Hezbollah officials may have assisted their movements.

The Commission reports that a "senior operative of Hezbollah" traveled to Saudi Arabia in October 2000 "to coordinate activities there." That same official "planned to assist individuals in Saudi Arabia in traveling to Iran during November." Indeed, Ahmed al Ghamdi, one of the al Qaeda hijackers of United Airlines Flight 175, and "a


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senior Hezbollah operative" shared a flight into Beirut in November.

Like al Ghamdi, some of the other hijackers traveled to Iran through Hezbollah's home turf—Lebanon. In November 2000, Salem al Hazmi, one of the American Airlines Flight 77 hijackers, traveled to Beirut. The same month, three other hijackers—Wail al Shehri, Waleed al Shehri, and Ahmed al Nami—"traveled in a group from Saudi Arabia to Beirut and then onward to Iran." An unnamed associate of Mugniyah's accompanied them on the Beirut-to-Iran leg of their trip. The 9/11 Commission noted: "Hezbollah officials in Beirut and Iran were expecting the arrival of a group during [mid-November 2000]. The travel of this group was important enough to merit the attention of senior figures in Hezbollah."

Other flights taken by the hijackers during this period originated or ended in Iran. Two of the hijackers flew from Iran to Kuwait in October, and two others flew to Iran from Bahrain in November. Al Qaeda hijacker Kahlid al-Mihdhar—whom the CIA had observed at an al Qaeda planning session in January 2000—"may have taken a flight from Syria to Iran, and then traveled further within Iran to a point near the Afghan border" in February 2001.

Since the 9/11 Commission could not interview the hijackers themselves about their travels, the commissioners wanted to question such ringleaders as were in American custody. But the CIA refused to allow commissioners or staff to interview any of the al Qaeda agents in CIA custody. Instead, as Kean and Hamilton relate, the commissioners referred this "deeply troubling" matter to the terrorists' interrogators, who returned an answer "just in time" for its inclusion in the 9/11 Commission's final report.

The CIA tried to assuage any concerns over Iranian involvement by relying on al Qaeda's supposed denials. Both Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the plot's mastermind, and Ramzi Binalshibh, al Qaeda's point man for the 9/11 plot, "confirmed that several of the 9/11 hijackers … transited Iran on their way to or from Afghanistan, taking advantage of the Iranian practice of not stamping Saudi passports." But they "deny any other reason for the hijackers' travel to Iran." In addition, "they also deny any relationship between the hijackers and Hezbollah." The commissioners were, for the most part, satisfied, concluding that they "found no evidence that Iran or Hezbollah was aware of the planning for what later became the 9/11 attack." Yet they left the matter open: "We believe this topic requires further investigation by the U.S. government."

Indeed, there is already evidence to suggest that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's and Ramzi Binalshibh's denials are not credible. Binalshibh, in particular, had ties to Iran that the Commission did not explore.

In December 2000, as first reported in July 2004 by *Newsweek*'s Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball and the *Chicago Tribune*'s John Crewdson, Binalshibh applied for a four-week visa at the Iranian Embassy in Berlin. On his handwritten application, Binalshibh checked a box indicating that the purpose of his visit was tourism or pilgrimage to one of Iran's holy sites. One question on the application was, "If you are passing through Iran in transit have you obtained entry visa for your next country of stay?" Binalshibh replied that he had not. The Iranians granted Binalshibh's visa request. On January 31, 2001, he landed at Tehran International Airport. The German investigators who uncovered Binalshibh's trip know little about his time in Iran—why he went, who he met with, and whether or not he went on to Afghanistan to meet al Qaeda's senior leadership. According to Crewdson, Binalshibh returned to Germany on February 28, 2001.

Six days before 9/11, Crewdson reported, Binalshibh once again traveled from Germany to Iran, thereby evading capture in the wake of al Qaeda's most spectacular attack. He would eventually turn up in Pakistan, where he was captured one year later. Why did Binalshibh repeatedly travel to Iran? Did U.S. interrogators ask him about these travels?

There is another twist. The 9/11 Commission did not name the senior Hezbollah officials who may have coordinated the hijackers' travels. But Kenneth Timmerman, the author of *Countdown to Crisis*, has written and stated repeatedly that knowledgeable intelligence officials have told him one of them was Imad Mugniyah himself.

More than three years after the 9/11 Commission published its final report and more than six years after the 9/11 attacks, we are still not certain of Mugniyah's, Hezbollah's, and Iran's possible role. The Commission recommended "further investigation," but no such investigation has been started. None of the press accounts this past week called for further inquiry by the U.S. government.

Some will dismiss out of hand any attempt to connect Mugniyah and bin Laden, convinced that the Sunnis of al Qaeda are incapable of collaborating with the Shiites of Hezbollah and Iran. As a factual matter, that is not true. There is ample evidence of contacts and collaboration throughout the historical record.

Mugniyah is now dead, but his influence on modern Islamic terrorism is alive and well. The martyrdom cult that plagues the world today was already manifest in his earliest attacks in Beirut in 1983. Mugniyah's terror showed the world that fanatics willing to kill themselves and others for their cause can change the course of history. Al Qaeda learned that lesson all too well. ♦


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# The McCain Economic 'Team'

*Intellectual diversity, for better and for worse*

**By Andrew Ferguson**

You probably have your own favorite, which is fine, but for my money the most revealing moment of the presidential campaign (so far!) came during the last debate among the Republican candidates, on January 24. Ron Paul briefly alighted on our fragile planet and challenged John McCain, if elected, to abolish something called the President's Working Group on Financial Markets, which Paul seems to think rivals the Trilateral Commission and the Knights Templar for sinister nefariousness. McCain didn't answer Paul's question, but on the more general matter of how he would make economic policy, he did say this:

> But I as president, as every other president, rely primarily on my secretary of the Treasury, on my Council of Economic Advisers, on the head of that. I would rely on the circle that I have developed over many years of people like Jack Kemp, Phil Gramm, Warren Rudman, Pete Peterson and the Concord group. I have a process of leadership, Ron, that is sort of an inclusive one that I have developed, a circle of acquaintances and people that are supporters and friends of mine who I have worked with for many, many years.

Notice that phrase "people like." What makes it odd is that those people aren't like each other at all, at least when it comes to their economic views. A couple of them, if you put them in the same room, would set off an intergalactic explosion like the collision of matter and antimatter.

One adviser, Jack Kemp, is the man who talked Ronald Reagan into embracing supply side economics in the 1970s, which launched the Reagan boom of the 1980s. He's the world's bubbliest advocate of tax cuts, dismissing the traditional Republican fixation on balanced budgets as "root canal" economics. Another adviser, Peter Peterson, *is* root canal economics. He's a dour Jeremiah who called the Reagan boom a "mad, drunken bash" and thinks steep tax increases on income, gasoline, tobacco, and alcohol, on top of a 5 percent consumption tax, are necessary to put the government's finances in order. He and Rudman run the Concord Coalition, an advocacy group that regards the federal government's budget deficit as the country's foundational economic problem.

Let's stipulate that a president should seek advice from a wide assortment of counselors. And McCain's list may very well reveal a refreshingly nonideological approach to policy making that will prove popular in our post-partisan era of change, the future, causes-greater-than-your-self-interest, hope, and so on. Then again, it might reveal something else. You can't help but wonder: Does McCain know the unbridgeable philosophical differences among the men he mentioned, or are these simply the names that occur to him when someone asks about economic policy? There's good reason to think that in economic matters, John McCain doesn't know his own mind. He's even admitted as much, in off-the-cuff statements that Democrats will be repeating from now till November.

"The issue of economics is not something I've understood as well as I should," McCain told the *Boston Globe* late last year. He said that in choosing a vice president he'd look for a person with economic experience to compensate for his own shortcomings. "I'm going to be honest," he told Stephen Moore of the *Wall Street Journal* three years ago. "I know a lot less about economics than I do about military and foreign policy issues. I still need to be educated." McCain has since tried, implausibly, to disavow all these statements, protesting that his knowledge of economics is perfectly sufficient for a president. But the zigs and zags of his 25-year career as a congressman and senator suggest that, when he said he didn't know much about economic policy, he was giving us some of that bracing straight talk.

McCain came to the House of Representatives in 1983. He was a standard-issue Republican of the day—an adherent of the newly minted Republican orthodoxy of Reaganism, which made rapid

*Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at* The Weekly Standard.



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economic growth, rather than a balanced federal budget, the chief goal of fiscal policy. He supported deep cuts in the marginal tax rate on income and capital gains. At the same time (like Reagan himself) he maintained a mostly theoretical advocacy of a balanced budget, pushing such hopeless nostrums as a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution and a presidential line-item veto. When he bucked the party's leadership, it was on the side of a smaller government and lower taxes. After Congress approved Reagan's plan for a government-run catastrophic-care insurance program, financed by a tax increase on wealthy seniors, McCain led the successful effort to repeal the new tax a year later, in 1989. Like many Republican senators, he voted against President George H.W. Bush's 1990 budget because it contained multiple tax increases that violated Bush's famous read-my-lips campaign pledge. Three years later, he joined in his party's unanimous rejection of President Clinton's 1993 proposed increase in marginal tax rates on capital gains and income.

**Supply-sider Jack Kemp with McCain in South Carolina in January**

By the time McCain announced for president in 1999, he had built a consistent roll call of conservative votes on fiscal issues—a record that was, however, largely indistinguishable from those of his Republican colleagues. In an interview at the time, he said that "tax reform—i.e., a flat tax," would be one of his signal issues during his coming presidential campaign. But it was clear his intellectual interests lay elsewhere, in foreign policy and military affairs. In the interview he was asked which of the various flat tax proposals he favored.

"No preferences, really," he said. "We'd have to sort them out through a process of examination, discussion, and debate. If the American people thought we were serious about cleaning up the tax code, then we'd get a lot of expert advice. There are a lot of experts out there, you know. A lot of smart people. We could get the best and listen to them. I don't have the expertise really to be very knowledgeable about it. I read a lot about it, but it depends on who you read."

McCain's reading evidently led him in an unexpected direction, to a position opposite the one he'd held a few months earlier. By the time the 2000 campaign began in earnest, McCain had abandoned the flat tax in favor of a "deficit-reduction" plan that provided small tax breaks to middle-income taxpayers but otherwise left untouched the increases in marginal rates that had been imposed under Clinton and Bush the Elder. "In fact," he said in another interview in 2000, "the program that I have gives them [rich folk] a slight tax increase." From this revised position it was a short hop to what free marketers and tax cutters consider his most unforgivable act of deviationism: his vote against President George W. Bush's tax-rate cuts on capital and income in 2001 and 2003. He was one of two Republican senators to defy Bush in 2001, and one of three in 2003.

Today McCain explains those votes in terms that would please Pete Peterson's school of balanced-budgets-first. The Bush tax cuts were unacceptable, he says in hindsight, because the revenue lost wasn't matched by reductions in federal spending. Even Kemp, the happy supply-sider who considers federal deficits a mere annoyance, agrees that this line of reasoning has a long and honorable pedigree in traditional Republican economics. But in 2001 and 2003, McCain scarcely mentioned the budget deficit in interviews explaining his votes. Back then he said he opposed the cuts in marginal tax rates because they were "regressive" and "unfair," redistributing income from the poor and middle-class to the rich.

This was the reason nearly all Democrats gave for opposing Bush's tax cuts, of course, and at times it seemed as though McCain was simply reaching for the


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rationale nearest at hand, which happened to be the Democrats' rationale—though in his case it was framed, in typical McCain style, as a matter of his own scrupulosity: "I cannot in good conscience support a tax cut in which so many of the benefits go to the most fortunate among us at the expense of middle-class Americans who need tax relief."

His public reasoning surprised even some of McCain's budget-balancing allies. Peterson's Concord Coalition opposed the Bush tax cuts, too, but not because they "benefited the rich." "Our argument was never about the distributional aspects," says Concord's executive director, Robert Bixby. McCain's opposition was particularly perplexing from someone who only two years before had advocated a flat tax—which entails a sharp cut in rates at the top of the income scale to encourage the flow of capital into private investment.

For that reason if no other, McCain's opposition blindsided his fellow Republicans. Bush's accountants, after all, had designed the tax cuts precisely to foreclose the fairness argument that McCain pulled off the shelf. Their reasoning was identical to the reasoning used by proponents of the flat tax. The income tax cut, they pointed out, was across the board: Most people got their income tax rates cut by the same number of percentage points. Any across-the-board cut in income tax rates means that in dollar terms rich people will get to keep more of their money than poor people will get to keep of theirs. This is because rich people have more money than poor people. Cut Bill Gates's income tax rate by two percentage points, and he gets to keep a few extra hundred million. Cut my income tax rate by two percentage points, and—peanuts.

McCain 'is a deficit hawk above all—has been since the day I met him,' Rudman says. Pete Peterson insists that McCain 'understands the solution to our long-term problems will involve some shared sacrifice.'

**Warren Rudman, above, and Peter Peterson**

But we got the same tax cut. That doesn't make the cut unfair, unless of course you consider it unfair that rich people have more money than poor people. And in that case your argument isn't with tax cuts but with capitalism.

There's no indication that McCain has ever thought his economic positions through this far. In economics, as in much else, he appears to operate on instinct. His professional experience—he's had a single job outside the government and military, working briefly for his father-in-law's beer distributorship in 1981—is unlikely to yield ideas about how the economy works in the way that a life spent, say, running a business or even practicing law would. He comes from money himself. His mother was heiress to an oil wildcatter, and his wife is wealthy, too. His most recent Senate financial disclosure form places his assets at between $20 million and $32 million, making him the seventh richest man in the Senate. Like a lot of rich people who've come into money rather than earned it—the heirs to the Kennedy and Rockefeller fortunes are the most famous examples—McCain seems less interested in how wealth is created than how it can be used, wherever it comes from.

Some of McCain's advisers offer another reason for his rejection of the Bush tax cuts: his festering resentment over the campaign Bush had run against him in 2000. Especially before the September 11 attacks, says one, "he couldn't stomach the idea of helping Bush." That's a more plausible explanation than the explanation McCain



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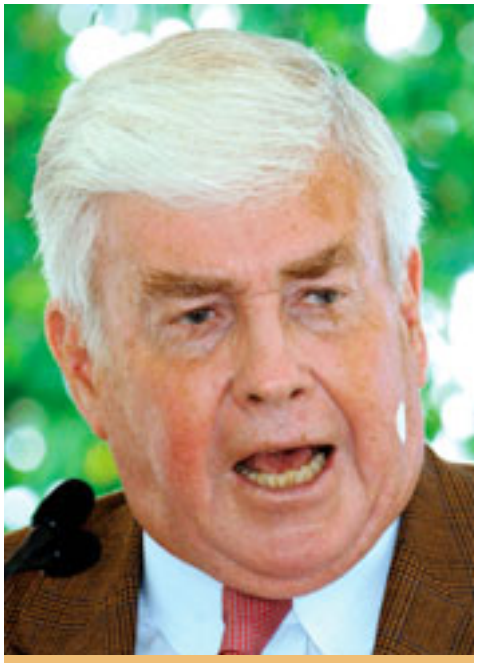
himself has offered—and certainly more in keeping with McCain's later Senate career, which consists of a series of regulatory crusades launched against persons and entities that have offended him. The tobacco legislation that McCain shepherded through his Commerce Committee in 1998, for example, was inspired by his revulsion at the seven tobacco executives who testified before Congress and famously refused to admit, under oath, that cigarettes caused lung cancer. "He just couldn't stand their lying that way," an aide said at the time. With its huge increase in cigarette taxes and its elaborate system of penalties, the legislation was one of the largest regulatory schemes ever cooked up on Capitol Hill. It was also a classic bill of attainder, designed to push the tobacco companies to the brink of bankruptcy without driving them out of business altogether.

McCain's method in domestic matters no less than in foreign affairs is military: He surveys a set of facts, identifies a villain, fixes him with his steely gaze, and then goes after him. McCain's longstanding efforts to tighten regulations on the campaign finance system also contain an important personal component. At first it was a reaction against the accusations of impropriety that dogged him in the Keating Five scandal of 1989, and then, after 2000, against the attack ads, paid for by Bush allies, that damaged his presidential campaign. Here the villains were PACs, lobbyists, and freelance partisans who bought political advertising during an election—and had to be stopped. More recently, he has championed a "patients' bill of rights" to tighten regulations on the HMOs, insurance companies, and employers he considers to be stingy with health benefits. Pharmaceutical companies should be reined in, he's said, because they're the "bad guys."



'I tell him: "Stop mentioning Pete Peterson!"' Kemp says. 'And he gets that. . . . When I talk about the Bush tax cuts and say, "John. John. That's not why we cut tax rates. We do it to incentivize people to put their capital at risk for new investment and capital formation." And he gets that. He gets it. . . . He just has to listen to the right people.'

What's unsettling is that you can never predict who the next bad guy will be. No consistent economic principles can be extracted from McCain's grab bag of policy positions, and no amount of textbook baloney about the free market, deregulation, and limited government will deter him from bringing his malefactors to justice. McCain's economics aren't ideological but improvisational—a campaign with shifting fronts, running on indignation. And a very large number of voters, probably a majority, will find this approach appealing because they don't buy all this textbook baloney about the free market and limited government either. When President McCain finds his villain and pursues him however he can, they will likely cheer their president and egg him on—unless, of course, he fixes his steely gaze on them.

As for his team of economic advisers, they continue to see in McCain a picture of their own aspiration. "He's a deficit hawk above all," Rudman told me. "Has been since the day I met him."

"He understands that the solution to our long-term problems will involve some shared sacrifice," Pete Peterson says. "And I think his leadership skills will be very effective in putting this idea of shared sacrifice across."

"I tell him: 'Stop mentioning Pete Peterson!'" Kemp says. "And he gets that. You look at Reagan. He ran a conventional Republican campaign in '76: limit spending, balanced budgets. Then [supply-side economist] Art Laffer and I and some others managed to talk to him. And in 1980 he ran as a growth candidate. I see something similar happening with John.

"It's true he doesn't have the same historical interest in economics that Reagan had. Reagan got it instinctively. But when I talk about the Bush tax cuts and John says, 'I don't think we should give money back to people who don't need it,' I say, 'John. John. That's not why we cut tax rates. We do it to incentivize people to put their capital at risk for new investment and capital formation.' And he gets that. He gets it.

"I don't want John to be perfect. Politics is multiplication, not subtraction, and he needs support from all sides. He just has to listen to the right people." ♦



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# Defending Life and Dignity

*How, finally, to ban human cloning*

**By Leon R. Kass**

In his State of the Union address President Bush spoke briefly on matters of life and science. He stated his intention to expand funding for new possibilities in medical research, to take full advantage of recent breakthroughs in stem cell research that provide pluripotent stem cells without destroying nascent human life. At the same time, he continued, "we must also ensure that all life is treated with the dignity that it deserves. And so I call on Congress to pass legislation that bans unethical practices such as the buying, selling, patenting, or cloning of human life."

As in his previous State of the Union addresses, the president's call for a ban on human cloning was greeted by considerable applause from both sides of the aisle. But Congress has so far failed to pass any anti-cloning legislation, and unless a new approach is adopted, it will almost certainly fail again.

Fortunately, new developments in stem cell research suggest a route to effective and sensible anti-cloning legislation, exactly at a time when novel success in cloning human embryos makes such legislation urgent. Until now, the cloning debate has been hopelessly entangled with the stem cell debate, where the friends and the enemies of embryonic stem cell research have managed to produce a legislative stalemate on cloning. The new scientific findings make it feasible to disentangle these matters and thus to forge a successful legislative strategy. To see how this can work, we need first to review the past attempts and the reasons they failed.

**By combining these restrictions with generous funding for regenerative medicine, we can show the American people and the world that it is possible to pursue the cures all dearly want without sacrificing the humanity we rightly cherish.**

Three important values, differently weighted by the contending sides, were (and are) at issue in the debates about cloning and embryonic stem cells: scientific and medical progress, the sanctity of human life, and human dignity. We seek to cure disease and relieve suffering through vigorous research, conducted within acceptable moral boundaries. We seek to protect vulnerable human life against destruction and exploitation. We seek to defend human procreation against degrading reproductive practices—such as cloning or embryo fusing—that would deny children their due descent from one father and one mother and their right not to be "manufactured."

Embryonic stem cell research pits the first value against the second. Many upholders of the sanctity of human life regard embryo destruction as unethical even if medical good may come of it; many partisans of medical research, denying to nascent human life the same respect they give to life after birth, regard cures for disease as morally imperative even if moral harm may come of it. But the deepest challenge posed by cloning has to do not with saving life or avoiding death, but with human dignity, and the cloning issue is therefore only accidentally bound up with the battle about stem cell research. Yet both parties to the stem cell debate happily turned the cloning controversy into the life controversy.

The faction favoring embryonic stem cell research wanted to clone embryos for biomedical research, and touted cloning's potential to produce individualized (that is, rejection-proof) stem cells that might eventually be used for therapy. Its proposed anti-cloning legislation

*Leon R. Kass is Hertog Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Harding Professor of Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and former chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics. He speaks here only for himself.*



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(the Kennedy-Feinstein-Hatch bill) would ban only "reproductive cloning" (cloning to produce children) while endorsing the creation of cloned human embryos for research. Such cloning-for-biomedical-research its proponents originally called "therapeutic cloning," hoping that the goal of "therapy" would get people to overcome their repugnance for "cloning." But when that strategy backfired, they disingenuously denied that the cloning of embryos for research is really cloning (they now call it, after the technique used to clone, SCNT, somatic cell nuclear transfer). They also denied that the product is a human embryo. These Orwellian tactics succeeded in confusing many legislators and the larger public.

**Rhesus monkeys born in August 1996 from embryos cloned in Beaverton, Oregon, using a method similar to that used to clone Dolly the sheep.**

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The faction opposed to embryonic stem cell research wanted to safeguard nascent human life. Its proposed anti-cloning legislation (the Weldon-Stupak bill in the House, the Brownback-Landrieu bill in the Senate) would ban *all* human cloning—both for reproduction and for biomedical research—by banning the initial step, the creation of cloned human embryos. (This is the approach I have favored, largely because I thought it the most effective way to prevent the production of cloned children.) But most of the bill's pro-life supporters cared much more that embryos not be created and sacrificed than that children not be clones. Accordingly, they sought to exploit the public's known opposition to cloning babies to gain a beachhead against creating embryos for destructive research, which practice, although ineligible for federal funding, has never been illegal in the United States. Initially, this strategy worked: In the summer of 2001, the Weldon-Stupak bill passed the House by a large bipartisan majority. (It has been passed again several times since.) But momentum was lost in the Senate, owing to delays caused by 9/11 and strong lobbying by the pro-stem cell forces, after which time an impasse was reached, neither side being able to gain enough votes to close debate.

Concerned that the United States appeared to be incapable of erecting any moral barriers to the march toward a Brave New World, the President's Council on Bioethics (I was then its chairman) sought to show the president and Congress a way forward. Setting aside our deep divisions (on the moral status of human embryos and federal funding of stem cell research), we successfully sought common ground and recommendations on which we could all agree.

In our 2004 report, *Reproduction and Responsibility*, we unanimously proposed a series of legislative bans to defend human procreation against certain egregious practices—practices that would blur the boundary between the human and the animal, exploit the bodies of women, deny children the right to normal biological lineage, and commodify nascent human life. We called for legislative moratoria on: the placement of a human embryo in the body of an animal; the fertilization of a human egg by animal sperm (or vice versa); the transfer of a human embryo to a woman's uterus for purposes other than producing a child; the buying, selling, and patenting of human embryos or fetuses; and (on the cloning front) the conception of a child other than by the union of egg and sperm, both taken from adults—a provision that would ban cloning as well as other unwelcome forms of reproduction.

Though these recommendations received a favorable response from the White House and from some members of Congress (in both parties), our recommendations were attacked from both sides. The scientists and the assisted-reproduction professionals, as anticipated, wanted no



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restrictive federal legislation whatsoever. Surprisingly, we were hit also from the right: Several leading pro-lifers objected to the "children's provision" on the ground that it appeared to be a retreat from the Brownback total ban on cloning—a bill they nevertheless conceded had no chance of passage in the Senate. To my astonishment, some powerful lobbyists privately told me they objected also to the animal-transfer provision, on the grounds that one should not ban any method that might rescue "extra" IVF embryos that would otherwise die. (When pressed on this point, one interlocutor said that she would gladly give a child a pig for a mother if that were the only way to rescue an otherwise doomed embryo!)

Of the Council's sensible recommendations, only one has been enacted: a ban on initiating a pregnancy for any purpose other than to produce a child. (This bill, enacted as an anti-"fetal-farming" rather than a defense of women measure, also amended the existing statute to forbid the use of cells or tissues derived from a human embryo gestated in an animal.)

Fast forward to 2008. We are in the last year of the Bush presidency. Despite the president's numerous calls for action, we remain the only major nation in the high-tech world that cannot summon itself to ban human cloning, thanks to the standoff over the embryo issues. Fortunately, science has given Congress another chance to act. In the last six months, the scientific landscape has changed dramatically. On the one hand, the need for anti-cloning legislation is now greater than ever; on the other hand, there are reasons why a new approach can succeed.

Here is what's new. After the 2005 Korean reports of the cloning of human embryos turned out to be a fraud, many said that human cloning could not be achieved. Yet late in 2007 Oregon scientists succeeded for the first time in cloning primate embryos and growing them to the blastocyst (5-7-day) stage, and then deriving embryonic stem cells from them. More recently, other American scientists, using the Oregon technique, have reported the creation of cloned human embryos. The age of human cloning is here, and the first clones, alas, do not read "made in China."

On the stem cell front, the news is decidedly better. In the last two years, several laboratories have devised methods of obtaining pluripotent human stem cells (the functional equivalent of embryonic stem cells) without the need to destroy embryos. The most remarkable and most promising of these approaches was reported last November by both Japanese and American scientists (including Jamie Thompson, the discoverer of human embryonic stem cells). It is the formation of human (induced) pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) by means of the reprogramming (also called de-differentiation) of somatic cells. Mature, specialized skin cells have been induced to revert to the pluripotent condition of their originating progenitor.

The therapeutic usefulness of this approach has also been newly demonstrated, by the successful treatment of sickle cell anemia in mice. Some iPSCs were derived from skin cells of an afflicted mouse; the sickle cell genetic defect in these iPSCs was corrected; the treated iPSCs were converted into blood-forming stem cells; and the now-normal blood-forming stem cells were transferred back into the afflicted mouse, curing the disease.

Scientists have hailed these results. All parties to the stem cell debates have noted that the embryonic-stem-cell war may soon be over, inasmuch as science has found a morally unproblematic way to obtain the desired pluripotent cells. But few people have seen the implications of these developments for the cloning debate: Cloning for the purpose of biomedical research has lost its chief scientific *raison d'être*. Reprogramming of adult cells provides personalized, rejection-proof stem cells, of known genetic make-up, directly from adults, and more efficiently than would cloning. No need for human eggs, no need to create and destroy cloned embryos, no need for the inefficient process of deriving stem cell colonies from cloned blastocysts. Ian Wilmut himself, the British scientist who cloned Dolly the sheep, has abandoned his research on cloning human embryos to work with reprogrammed adult cells.

Another effect of this breakthrough is that the value for stem cell research of the spare embryos that have accumulated in IVF clinics has diminished considerably, defusing the issue of the ban on federal funding of such research. Why work to derive new stem cell lines from frozen embryos (of unknown quality and unknown genetic composition, and with limited therapeutic potential owing to transplant immunity issues) when one can work with iPSCs to perfect the reprogramming approach and avoid all these difficulties?

That's not the only way the new scientific landscape changes the policy and legislative pictures. We are now able to disentangle and independently advance all three of the goods we care about. First, it now makes great sense to beef up federal support for regenerative medicine, prominently featuring ramped-up work with iPSCs (and other non-embryo-destroying sources of pluripotent human stem cells). The timing


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is perfect. The promise is great. The potential medical payoff is enormous. And the force of example for future public policy is clear: If we exercise both our scientific wit and our moral judgment, we can make biomedical progress, within moral boundaries, in ways that all citizens can happily support.

Second, we should call for a legislative ban on all attempts to conceive a child save by the union of egg and sperm (both taken from adults). This would ban human cloning to produce children, but also other egregious forms of baby making that would deny children a link to two biological parents, one male and one female, both adults. This approach differs from both the Kennedy-Feinstein-Hatch and the Brownback-Landrieu bills, yet it could—and should—gain support from people previously on both sides. It pointedly neither endorses nor restricts creating cloned embryos for research: Cloning embryos for research is no longer of such interest to scientists; therefore, it is also no longer, as a practical matter, so important to the pro-life cause. Moreover, the prohibited deed, operationally, should be the very act of *creating* the conceptus (with intent to transfer it to a woman for pregnancy), not, as the Kennedy-Feinstein-Hatch bill would have it, the *transfer* of the proscribed conceptus to the woman, a ban that would have made it a federal offense *not* to destroy the newly created cloned human embryos. The ban proposed here thus deserves the support of all, regardless of their position on embryo research.

Third, the time is also ripe for a separate bill to defend nascent life, by setting up a reasonable boundary in the realm of embryo research. We should call for a (four- or five-year) moratorium on all *de novo* creation—by whatever means—of human embryos for use in research. This would block the creation of embryos for research not only by cloning (or SCNT), the goal of the Brownback-Landrieu anti-cloning bill, but also by IVF. Such a prohibition can now be defended on practical as well as moral grounds. Many human embryonic stem cell lines exist and are being used in research; 21 such lines, still viable, are available for federally funded research, while an even greater number are being studied using private funds. The new iPSC research, however, suggests that our society can medically afford, at least for the time being, to put aside further creation of new human life merely to serve as a natural resource and research tool. We can now prudently shift the burden of proof to those who say such exploitative and destructive practices are absolutely necessary to seek cures for disease, and we can require more than vague promises and strident claims as grounds for overturning the moratorium.

Morally and strategically speaking, this triple-pronged approach has much to recommend it. It is at once more principled, more ambitious, and more likely to succeed than its predecessors. By addressing separately the cloning and embryo-research issues, we can fight each battle exactly on the principle involved: defense of human procreation or defense of human life. By broadening the first ban to include more than cloning, we can erect a barrier against all practices that would deny children born with the aid of reproductive technologies the ties enjoyed by children conceived naturally. By extending the second ban to cover all creation of life solely as an experimental tool, we can protect more than merely embryos created by cloning. We would force everyone to vote on the clear principles involved: Legislators would have to vote yea or nay on both weird forms of baby-making and the creation of human life solely for research, without bamboozling anyone with terminological sleights of hand. And by combining these legislative restrictions with strong funding initiatives for regenerative medicine, we can show the American people and the world that it is possible to vigorously pursue the cures all dearly want without sacrificing the humanity we rightly cherish.

Politically as well, this triple-pronged approach is a winner for all sides. Because the latest science has made creating embryos for research unnecessary and inefficient by comparison with reprogramming, we have the chance to put stem cell science on a footing that all citizens can endorse. Indeed, in return for accepting a moratorium on a scientific approach that is not very useful (creation of new embryos for research), scientists could exact large sums in public support for an exciting area of science. With pro-lifers as their biggest allies, they could obtain the research dollars they need—and their supposed enemies would write the biggest checks. Meanwhile, at the very time the latest science has made affronts to human procreation—cloning, but not only cloning—more likely and even imminent, pro-lifers and scientists can come together to ban these practices in America, as they have already been banned in the rest of the civilized world, without implicating the research debate at all.

In an election year, Congress will be little moved to act quickly on these seemingly low priority items. Moreover, the partisans who have produced the current impasse may still prefer to keep things at stalemate, the better to rally their constituents against the other side. But we can ill afford to be complacent. The science is moving very rapidly. Before the end of the summer, we may well hear of the cloning of primate babies or perhaps even of a human child. Now is the time for action, before it is too late. ♦


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*William Saroyan in rehearsal, ca. 1940*

TIME & LIFE PICTURES / GETTY IMAGES

# Saroyan Turns 100

## *The writer who asked, What does it mean to be alive?*

BY ANN STAPLETON

"I do not know what makes a writer, but it is probably not happiness," wrote the Fresno-born Armenian-American author and playwright William Saroyan, who died in 1981.

His father, a failed poet, died of appendicitis when Saroyan was barely three years old. His mother put her four children into Oakland's Fred Finch Orphanage and took on work as a domestic, hoping to reunite the family one day. She would eventually succeed, but the process would take five years. Meanwhile, Saroyan was consigned to the small boys' ward, where he fell asleep every night to the sounds of bereft boys rocking themselves and weeping.

As Saroyan's son Aram noted in *Last Rites*, about his difficult relationship with his father, whereas most of us come to a first perception of the world with a mother and father acting as a buffer between ourselves and death, Saroyan's "own link hooked up at the very moment of the dawning of his rational consciousness not with father, or mother—but with Death itself." He was "hooked into the abyss at *both* ends."

Afflicted with the lifelong emotional effects of his childhood experiences, and an acute anti-authority complex, Saroyan often found the intricacies of human relationships painful and mystifying. According to John Leggett, the biographical author of *A Daring Young Man*, it was the "Saroyan social paradox, that he could fill a room with bonhomie, but people were no more real to him than characters in a dream."

He quarreled with or disappointed almost everyone who ever tried to befriend him, including Random House's Bennett Cerf, MGM's Louis B. Mayer, and Darryl F. Zanuck, founder of Twentieth Century Fox. He told Lillian Hellman that her plays could use some songs to liven them up, and then proceeded to sing her some possibilities. James Mason once slapped him for talking nonstop at a premiere. And in

*Ann Stapleton is a writer in Ohio.*



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a retaliatory piece for *Esquire*, Ernest Hemingway, annoyed over a short story that seemed to mock his work, told Saroyan he wasn't "that bright" and that he should "watch" himself.

"Do I make myself clear," he added, "or would you like me to push your puss in?"

Even Saroyan's lifelong best friend, his cousin Ross Bagdasarian, became suspect. While on a boisterous cross-country road trip in a new Buick paid for with money from Saroyan's first Broadway success, the two of them put lyrics to old Armenian folk tunes and came up with the song "Come On-A My House (I'm Gonna Give You Candy)," which would become a hit for Rosemary Clooney. But Saroyan, saddled in later years with heavy gambling debts, found it impossible to forgive Bagdasarian's only crime: becoming set for life by creating the novelty recording act, The Chipmunks.

Saroyan was unhappily married, once for six years and a second time for a disastrous six months, to the sweet-spirited blonde socialite Carol Marcus, the inspiration for Holly Golightly in her childhood friend Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, lifelong friend to Gloria Vanderbilt and Oona O'Neill, and whose letters from beau "Jerry" (J.D. Salinger, as it turned out) Carol once plagiarized in an attempt to write entertainingly to Saroyan. Courted by Orson Welles, Mel Ferrer, Clifford Odets, Al Capp, and Marlon Brando, among others, she eventually settled into a marriage of over 40 years' duration with Walter Matthau, but Saroyan continued to rave about her and love her from a distance until death intervened.

A self-described "estranged man" ("I am little comfort to myself, though I am the only comfort I have"), Saroyan lost touch with his children Aram and Lucy—though when they learned of his final illness, they effected a tender reconciliation. But if temperament and early loss conspired to deprive Saroyan of a fulfilling personal life, in his writing he was determined, like his character who planted pomegranate trees in the desert, "to make a garden of this awful desolation."

Saroyan was a writing machine and fearless genre-hopper, achieving major successes in the short story (*The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze*), the novel (*The Human Comedy* and *My Name Is Aram*, the Armenian-American Huck Finn), and the autobiography (*The Bicycle Rider in Beverly Hills*, *Not Dying*, and others). And alongside Eugene O'Neill and Thornton Wilder he helped to found a truly American theater, with *My Heart's in the Highlands* and *The Time of Your Life*—for which he declined the Pulitzer Prize, on the grounds that institutions and the arts don't mix.

The Time of Your Life *by The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, 2007*

©GERRY GOODSTEIN

Prizing spontaneity and distrustful of too much revision, he wrote swiftly: two stories in a day, a play in one week, and once, three books in a month. The man who could consume an entire watermelon at one sitting lived to write, and wrote voraciously, "to save [his] life." He wanted to learn to write the way the snow was falling on the streets of New York, "the finest style" he'd ever seen, and the best of his work comes closer than the efforts of any other American writer to evoking the strange improvisational genius, the exuberance and despair, at the heart of an ordinary, lived life on earth.

In *Obituaries*, the last book he published in his lifetime, Saroyan expresses fascination with "a strange man in New York in the late thirties who at the opening of the opera season would go into the lobby with all of the rich and social people and suddenly stand on his head while the cameras flashed." The next day the newspapers would show the man, a kind of innocent who appeared to have no profit motive for his behavior, "standing on his head surrounded by astonished dowagers and dandies." Saroyan is very much the headstand-man of American letters, reminding us to discard the dark-suited formalities that deaden our responses to the world and invite the life force in.

"I am not afraid to make a fool of myself," Saroyan insisted, and this headlong audacity shows itself not only in his ahead-of-their-time, tenderly ranting, dark-adapted experimental stories, but also in his daredevil choice of subjects familiarly symbolic and emotion-laden and dear to the human imagination, and then breaking the seal of our accustomed blindness to expose



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the original depth and eccentricity, the brief, strong flash of light, beneath.

A case in point is his short story "The Hummingbird That Lived Through Winter," in which an elderly blind man and a young boy revive, with a teaspoonful of warmed honey, an ailing hummingbird trapped in the wrong season. The tale is life-affirming, yes, but only in a narrowly qualified way that depends heavily for its impact on the hovering presence of death. Like the unnerving background sound of the demolition crew coming closer and closer in his play *The Cave Dwellers*, in Saroyan, the knowledge that things end is never very far away.

The two figures and the tiny flicker of intensity that is the hummingbird are made present to us for only a moment within a minor bubble of daylight poised against the blackness of eternity. It is winter to which the bird must return. The man is aged and mortal. And the boy, too, must choose to act blindly, without ever knowing whether his love will save anything at all.

Yet life relentlessly presents itself to us, here in the form of "this wonderful little creature of the summertime," dying "in the big rough hand of the old peasant" who, in his blindness, must ask the boy just learning to discern the world, "What is this in my hand?" As we, too, look down into the tender but only temporary nest the old man's palm makes of itself in the air, Saroyan forces us to *see* the imperiled being there, "not suspended in a shaft of summer light," and "not the most alive thing in the world" anymore, but "the most helpless and heartbreaking."

In the wild throbbing of this smallest heart, we can feel our own pulse beat, and by extension, the whole world's. What *is* this thing called life? How can it possibly be? And knowing it will someday perish, what do we do with it now? Despite all our helplessness, so much of the world is left up to us. A terrifying responsibility, in its way, about which Saroyan is wholly unsentimental, yet wholly encouraging: We must live.

When the boy later asks the old man whether their hummingbird survived the winter, his answer is the only one he can give: That the hummingbirds the boy watches in the summer air *are* the one they saved.

> "Each of them is our bird. Each of them, each of them," he said swiftly and gently.

In "Why I Write," Saroyan clearly lays out this notion of immortality: "*One* of a kind couldn't stay, and couldn't apparently be made to." But "something *did* stay, something *was* constant, or appeared to be. It was the *kind* that stayed." For Saroyan, the only thing that can "halt the action" of our disappearance is art, "the putting of limits upon the limitless, and thereby holding something fast and making it seem constant, indestructible, unstoppable, unkillable, deathless." By abetting the escape of the hummingbird into the imagination of the reader, Saroyan wins the little hand-to-hand combat with death which is this story. He knew that we need such victories to help us bear our lives.

*Saroyan in the 1970s*

KATHERINE EASTLAND

The Swiss critic Henri-Frédéric Amiel wrote that dreams are a "semi-deliverance from the human prison," a concept Saroyan takes as a given. In *The Time of Your Life*, he describes the character Joe as actually "holding the dream," not a sentimentality at all, but a tip of the hat to the iron reality of our inner lives.

Harry the Hoofer, played by the young Gene Kelly on Broadway, sees that "the world is sorrowful" and "needs laughter," which he dreams of providing by means of his awkward, decidedly unfunny, desperate dance that never stops. The sad clown Harry, whose "pants are a little too large," whose coat is "loose" and "doesn't match," is the perfect type of modern man:

> He comes in timidly, turning about uncertainly, awkward, out of place everywhere, embarrassed and encumbered by the contemporary costume, sick at heart, but determined to fit in somewhere. His arrival constitutes a dance.

Harry fails to make the world laugh; his dream goes unrealized. Yet his blundering movements make the audience want to weep in recognition of their own inelegant lives, their own ungraceful losses. The vividness of their own dreams makes Harry real.

When Saroyan's mother left him at the orphanage, she distracted him with a little windup toy, a dancing black minstrel that made him stop crying. Years after he wrote *The Time of Your Life*, Saroyan would realize that Harry the Hoofer was that toy brought to life. It is the genius of Saroyan that the sight of Harry dancing, the very image of ceaseless exuberance, evokes pity and grief in the onlooker, that the very thing meant to stop our crying is what allows us to weep for ourselves and for each other, for the thing we have lost forever and for all we will never find.

*Don't Go Away Mad*, dedicated to his son Aram and infused with the grief and rage of Saroyan's divorce and the loss of his children, is an excruciatingly



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dark, inverted morality play about hospital patients waiting to die, reading a dictionary aloud as their collective last act, and as Saroyan must have been at the time of his writing, desperately trying to wring some meaning and hope from the words.

A character called Greedy Reed, glad his *abdomen*—he reads the word from the dictionary—is still intact, unlike that of poor Andy Boy (another patient for whom Reed, in his belatedly discovered humanity, prays), considers what he is up against:

> I been thinking all my life black the trouble with me, but black ain't the trouble with me at all. Lots of good men black. Lots of good men white, red, or some other color. Color ain't the trouble with me or anybody else. Something else the trouble with me. Who fool around with me this way all the time, make me carry on? Who make me ornery? Who make me proud of my abdomen right here in this sad place, at this sad time, Poseyo?

The image of the ignorant, abdomen-proud man seeking the source of all human dissatisfaction, anticipating his own imminent death even as he tries, so late, to find a reason to live, is ludicrous and poignant and passing strange, and a crystal-clear mirror Saroyan holds up to each face in the audience: "You are still alive, my friend. In the time of your life, live!" The entwisted particularity and universality of the image, in service to a truly desperate affirmation of this life (as Saroyan said of his writing) "is careless . . . but something that is good, that is [his] alone, that no other writer could ever achieve."

In *Don't Go Away Mad*, life and hope and belief are redeemed by way of a murder, as if Christ, instead of dying on the Cross, had gone out and killed for our sins. But as genuinely dark as the piece may be, in its preface Saroyan makes a stand for the real truth of any life, and for an art that reflects the reality of the psyche's insistent, if roundabout, tendency toward its own continued existence:

> Despair overwhelms everybody, but for how long? If it is for an instant now and then, if it is for years now and then, for centuries now and then, the fact remains that despair is never by itself *all* of the story whether in an individual or in an entire people; despair may dominate, it may qualify and color everything else, but everything else is also always there; and it would be inaccurate, though it would make for easier playwriting, to pretend that this were not so.

This is the statement of a realist. The sun *does* shine: not every hour, not even every day, but often enough. The most cynical of men looks upon his own child's face and is changed by what it believes of him. A middle-aged couple kisses, surprised to find themselves, after so many years, in love. Someone somewhere peers into the abyss and roars with laughter. Life goes on. And Saroyan the headstand-man reminds us to "try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with all [our] might," for the simple reason that we "will be dead soon enough."

It is this knowledge that death will one day take away everything that makes Saroyan a fine, acute poet of yearning. In his flawless story "Five Ripe Pears," a young boy cuts class to go and pluck, in their moment of perfect unstayable ripeness, the pears he has been so intently willing into their existence that they seem to him, by virtue of his love for them, to be rightfully his:

> Running to pears as a boy of six is any number of classically beautiful things: music and poetry and maybe war. I reached the trees breathless but alert and smiling. The pears were fat and ready for eating, and for plucking from limbs. They were ready. The sun was warm. The moment was a moment of numerous clarities, air, body, and mind.

"I wanted wanting and getting, and I invented means," says the narrator. But of course, the act of concourse that takes place where pear and daylight and the boy's yearning inexorably come together—that unstoppable blossoming of the world in the light of human attention—is untranslatable, and therefore incommunicable; and in it, Saroyan accesses the intractable loneliness borne at one time or another by every human being. The boy can expect no understanding from anyone; he is branded a thief and receives a "sound licking with a leather strap" for he possesses no language in which to mount a defense of beauty's power and our helplessness before it:

> A tragic misfortune of youth is that it is speechless when it has the most to say, and a sadness of maturity is that it is garrulous when it has forgotten where to begin and what language to use. Oh, we have been well-educated in error, all right. We at least know that we have forgotten.

"I know I was deeply sincere about wanting the ripe pears, and I know I was determined to get them, and to remain innocent," says the boy, and in that last phrase lies the unassuming power of Saroyan's writing. He knew firsthand that "people ain't necessarily the same in the evening as they were in the morning." But regardless of his characters' circumstances or their actions, for him, they remained innocent: "If nothing else, drawing into the edge of full death every person is restored to innocence—to have lived was not his fault."

Wayworn wings. A toy to stop you from crying. Pears. A word that might explain everything. In William Saroyan, it is not that you can keep the thing you love from disappearing in the distance, or that the heart in each of us does not break to watch it go. It is not that you will never die. But that, "in the time of your life," you must find a way to live, an imperative both metaphysical and urgently practical that none of us escapes. And that is the why of it, the reason to read Saroyan, to read for the reason he said he wrote: "To go on living."

To be pointed back toward the strange, once-in-every-lifetime miracle of your own being, while you are still here, "still the brave man or woman or child of the age, still famous for your breathing uninterruptedly." To keep dancing like Harry the Hoofer, even in expectation of the inevitable cessation of all movement. "It's a goofy dance," done "with great sorrow, but much energy." But, as Saroyan wrote, "What a thing it is to be alive." ♦



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*Mecca's Grand Mosque, November 1979*

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

# Enter the Mahdi

## *Was this the opening shot that led to 9/11?*

**BY TIMOTHY R. FURNISH**

Where did the road to 9/11, and the current war against Islamist terrorism, begin? Conventional wisdom trots out the usual suspects: the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the 1978 Camp David Accords, the first Gulf War, Osama bin Laden's 1998 *fatwa* against Jews and "Crusaders." Some analysts go back to the Islamist Sayyid Qutb's execution by Nasser's regime in 1966, or the dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate after World War I.

Yaroslav Trofimov places the responsibility for al Qaeda and its bloody brood on a crucial "forgotten" event: the 1979 takeover of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by a group convinced that the Mahdi, the "rightly-guided one" predicted in Islamic traditions to create a global caliphate, had come. For two weeks—November 20 through December 4, 1979—hundreds of these Mahdists held Saudi forces at bay in Islam's holiest site, until the kingdom's forces finally ended the occupation—but not the effects, which reverberate to this day.

**The Siege of Mecca**
*The Forgotten Uprising in Islam's Holiest Shrine and the Birth of Al Qaeda*
by Yaroslav Trofimov
Doubleday, 320 pp., $26

Trofimov delineates both the transnational and domestic context of this revolt: the revolution in Iran, which stoked fears (justified, as it turned out) among Sunni leaders of minority Shiite uprisings at home; the struggles between the Pan-Arab secular ideology of Nasser's Egypt and Saudi Arabia's Pan-Islamic counteragenda; the simmering resentments among tribal elements in the kingdom toward the ruling Saudi princes; and the increasingly obvious failure of the Saudi rulers to abide by their own Wahhabi Islam.

Into this combustible mix stepped Juhayman al-Utaybi, "a forty-three-year-old Bedouin preacher with magnetic black eyes, sensual lips, and shoulder-length hair that seamlessly blended into a curly black beard." A most unlikely leader, he spent 18 years in the Saudi National Guard yet drove a water truck and never rose higher than corporal. But in the national guard he made important contacts, especially among the *Ikhwan*, or "Brothers"—the sons of Bedouin warriors whose fathers had been humbled by the triumphant Saudis. Al-Utaybi also became a devotee of the pragmatic Islamist cleric Abdul Aziz bin Baz at Medina's Islamic University. Bin Baz was not afraid to criticize the Saudis for allowing cigarette and alcohol sales, and for allowing women to teach boys. But having been imprisoned in the past for his bluntness, bin Baz knew where to draw the line, one reason why he eventually became the chief mufti in the kingdom.

In 1978 al-Utaybi managed to publish, in Kuwait, his *Rasa'il*, or "epistles," which excoriated Saudi Arabia for its lack of Islamic piety, reliance on American support, and failure to crack down on the heretical Shiites. The Saudis arrested a number of al-Utaybi's supporters, and he went underground. But bin Baz intervened, getting the charges dismissed and saving al-Utaybi from imprisonment or worse.

This turned out to be a huge mistake, for one of his chapters dealt with Islamic eschatological (end of time) prognostications. Specifically, drawing on the relevant Islamic *hadiths*, or "traditions," al-Utaybi discussed the coming of the Mahdi for whom he was searching. Eventually al-Utaybi decided the Mahdi was one Muhammad Abd Allah al-Qahtani, "sensitive and shy . . . given to dreamy silences and . . . passionate poetry in flowery classical Arabic." Al-Qahtani also possessed the same first name as the Prophet, as well as "a broad forehead, a prominent nose, and a big red mark on his cheek"—fitting the Mahdi's physical description. But al-Qahtani had to be convinced he was the Mahdi. And even among al-Utaybi's supporters—who included Egyptians as well as Saudis—there were skeptics. But "Mahdi or not, for them this

*Timothy R. Furnish is the author of* Holiest Wars: Islamic Mahdis, Their Jihads, and Osama bin Laden.



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was an uprising against a puppet regime of American infidels, and Juhayman sounded charismatic and well-intentioned enough to succeed."

The Saudi government missed this brewing rebellion, more focused on "far" enemies such as militantly Shiite Iran or the atheistic Soviet Union. So the Mahdist "near" enemy had no trouble, after a bit of bribery, smuggling weapons into Islam's holiest edifice. On the morning of November 20, 1979, they gunned down guards, cowed thousands of worshippers into submission, placed snipers in minarets, and began broadcasting over loudspeakers that the Mahdi had come and that the *bay'ah* (loyalty oath) to the Saudis was henceforth dissolved, to be replaced by one to the Mahdi.

The government responded sluggishly because of bad intelligence, turf fighting between the Interior Ministry and the Saudi army, and "an avalanche of theological confusion" about whether the Mahdi actually *had* arrived. Within a few days bin Baz and the senior *ulama* (clerics) issued a *fatwa* rejecting that claim and authorizing the use of force within the mosque. But this theological cover came at a price: The *ulama* demanded, and got, a re-Islamization of Saudi society and, more ominously, a promise to put the kingdom's wealth behind the global dissemination of Wahhabi Islam.

Saudi forces underestimated the Mahdists' numbers and military experience and launched several disastrous attacks before managing to take back the mosque grounds. But most Mahdists retreated to the *Qaboos*, the basement level, where they had stockpiled ammunition and provisions. Unable to dislodge them, the kingdom reluctantly decided to ask for outside help. Jordan was ruled out because of possible Hashemite irredentism regarding Mecca and Medina. The CIA was discounted because Prince Turki, head of Saudi intelligence, "felt that the spy agency had been 'emasculated' by strict congressional restrictions and that its operational capacity had been largely destroyed under the Carter administration." (Also, the Saudis were angry that a Carter administration briefing had mentioned the occupation, blowing their press blackout.)

*Annointed by a Bedouin preacher as the Mahdi, Muhammad Abd Allah al-Qahtani was 'sensitive and shy ... given to dreamy silences and ... passionate poetry in flowery classical Arabic.' He had the same first name as the Prophet, as well as facial features and a 'big red mark on his cheek' that fit the Mahdi's physical description.*

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

So the Saudis turned to the French. The Groupe d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie sent a team which advised attacking with a powerful tear gas, CB. By December 4 the Saudis had cleared the mosque, killing many (including the alleged Mahdi) and capturing 63, most of whom were publicly beheaded two months later.

Trofimov's accounts of the violent anti-American riots in Pakistan and Libya at that time—by rent-a-mobs blaming the hapless Carter White House for the siege—suggest that the "Muslim street" was primed to kill Americans long before George W. Bush took office. And Trofimov is certainly correct that "Juhayman's multinational venture, which blended for the first time the Saudi militants' Wahhabi-inspired zeal and the Egyptian jihadis' conspiratorial skills, was a precursor of al Qaeda itself."

Yet while Trofimov's account rectifies the discounting of al-Utaybi, it overcompensates by making his uprising the motivation for Osama bin Laden's founding of al Qaeda, Mehmet Ali Agca's attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II, and even, indirectly, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that began on December 25, 1979, after the end of the siege ("the surprising weakness shown . . . by Saudi and Pakistani regimes . . . could only embolden the Kremlin").

The greatest value of *The Siege of Mecca* is in documenting how Mahdism is not just a Shiite phenomenon but can erupt violently in a Sunni context. While Shiite Iran's President Ahmadinejad merely pays lip service to the Mahdi's coming, at least four Sunni Mahdis have actually declared themselves this year alone—in Indonesia, Gaza, India, and Bangladesh—while a violent Mahdist uprising in southern Iraq, encompassing both Sunnis and Shiites, was crushed in January 2007. Some Muslims have even claimed that Osama bin Laden might be the Mahdi.

The 1979 siege of Mecca might well have been a foretaste of what Mahdism may come. ♦



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# The Jewish Question

*To convert, and if so, why?* **BY STEVEN OZMENT**

*German Jewish sports club, 1925*

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There is no book more exciting to read than one by an author who believes he or she was born to write it. In such books every line becomes a paragraph, every paragraph a chapter, and the book itself a never-ending story. Deborah Hertz's *How Jews Became Germans* is such a book.

**How Jews Became Germans**
*The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*
by Deborah Hertz
Yale, 288 pp., $38

Hertz knew she was onto something big several years before she took pen to paper. While researching her dissertation (a study of late 18th-century Jewish salon women who converted to Protestantism), she discovered the Berlin Jewish Index File, a creation of a Nazi genealogical research project that began in 1933. It presented an apparent comprehensive list of every Jew who converted to Protestantism in Berlin between 1645 and 1933. Once in hand, the Nazis used it to check the ethnic purity of candidates for high positions in the regime, going back at least four generations.

Since thousands of Jews converted to the Protestant faith over the previous three centuries, those records also allowed the Nazis generally to "replace the religious polarity of Christians and Jews with the racial polarity of Aryans and Jews." The merged Kinship Research Office and Central Archive of the German Jews estimated the existence of no fewer than 800 million birth, marriage, and death entries in their vast records, far more than was needed to discomfort untold numbers of 20th-century German Jews and Christians, whose genealogy came under the Aryan microscope.

As a quantitative record, the Index gave Hertz accurate data on the numbers of Jews who became Christians in the period covered by her study. Around that data, she has re-created "the actual history" of Jewish conversion in Berlin over the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Her case studies are elite families well known to modern scholars. Yet her deep and sympathetic scrutiny of this unique emotional and controversial transition in the lives of her subjects illumines the human realities in new and moving ways. What she calls her "modern cosmopolitan side" understands the appeal of a national culture and civil rights to then-disenfranchised Jews, and she does not judge quickly those Jews, young and old, who readily succumbed to the siren call of modern Germany.

With novelist Martin Walser and biographer Victor Klemperer, she believes Jewish conversion to Christianity in those distant centuries was also an act of personal and cultural emancipation, and not merely a betrayal of traditional Judaism, as philosopher Jürgen Habermas and authors Gershom Scholem and Daniel Goldhagen characterize it.

Many Jews who sought a Protestant baptism loved modern Germany and its culture and wanted to immerse themselves fully in the culture of their generation and era. Protestant identity was "an avenue to becoming more German on the inside," a key to personal identification with the nation, not merely a religious-spiritual choice.

The converts loved the Fatherland enough to leave their hallowed ancient religion, then being challenged by a vibrant modern culture and politics. Putting herself in her subjects' shoes as every good historian must, Hertz asks the reader to judge their choices "in the terms contemporaries saw them."

Conversions of Berlin Jews to Christianity date back to 1671, when exiled Viennese Jews settled there by invitation. Already then there was "a trickle" of poor Jewish converts into Luther-

*Steven Ozment, Mclean professor of ancient and modern history at Harvard, is the author, most recently, of* A Mighty Fortress: A New History of the German People.



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anism. From the mid-17th century through the 18th, Berlin Judaism progressively lost its discipline and knowledge of Hebrew (Yiddish transliterations then appeared) and was thereafter on the defensive: "More and more German Jews dressed and talked like [Catholic] Christians." Lutheran pietism, especially, made inroads into Berlin Jewry, circulating missionary pamphlets in Yiddish and entering synagogues on days of worship to proselytize.

For conservative Jews at this time, confessing the dominant religion and embracing the dominant culture were "a rare chance to make a dramatic change in one's life circumstances," promising the willing individual the rights of citizenship and access to the top civil jobs. Between 1700-1750, several hundred largely poorer Jews converted to Christianity in migrant cities, 153 in Berlin.

Hertz showcases the grandeur of Berlin Jewry in the late 18th and early 19th centuries through well-known leading Jewish families, among them that of her heroine, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, who was 31 in 1803. Throughout her lifetime, Rahel's family socialized with Christians, entertained an eclectic circle of friends, and held salons where both practicing and converted Jews met freely and talked. Berlin was then a "pulsating center" of the Jewish Enlightenment, and Rahel's privileged and liberally raised generation grew up experimenting with non-Jewish lives "far from the language, values, and habits of their parents." However, a high price came with such experimentation. Even in very liberal circles, conservative Jews and Christians turned on Jews who, like Rahel's generation, "tried so hard to be less Jewish."

Nineteenth-century parents acted preemptively to gain for their children the benefits of non-Jews, hoping thereby to spare them the civil discrimination they otherwise faced in youth and adulthood. Between 1800 and 1874, 60 percent of all Berlin converts to Christianity were children under five, reflections of parental love and determination to secure a free and full civil life for their children.

Between 1807 and 1811, French occupation and rule saw Berlin Jews embrace the French Revolution. Rahel Levin was a Napoleon enthusiast and a fan of the German nationalist Johann Fichte, alleged founder of modern German nationalism and a strong opponent of civil rights for Jews. In these exuberant years Berlin became a magnet city for the best and brightest young Jews, then a remarkable 7 percent of university students.

*Heinrich Heine*

By 1811, Germans had had their fill of the French occupation and were viewing Jewish emancipation as a French policy—not a good omen for Jews. Also at this time, the protective old regime alliance of the Jewish elite and the German nobility was showing its cracks, another bad omen for Jews. The Emancipation Law of 1812 ("a golden moment in Jewish life") was to be its last hurrah.

Even though many Jews were deeply patriotic and eager to serve their German Fatherland as free men and free women, Germans remained skeptical in the wake of war and were not about to grant them equal freedoms at this time. The fine print of the Edict of 1812 proved to offer only a partial emancipation: "The spirit of the Edict was that if Jews became modern and served the state loyally, eventually a wider equality *might* come."

Individual Jews clearly gained a greater, if directed, freedom, while the larger Jewish community saw a "thinning of corporate identity," losing all its rights as a state within the state. The Edict was also interpreted to support the repression of reformed Judaism, which was seen to discourage Jewish assimilation.

In the end, Christian conversion and baptism were the only effective and immediate way to gain a functional emancipation. A Jew could not marry a Christian until he or she had first become a Christian. Nor did an unconverted Jew have any protection against blacklisting when applying for a government job. Although some government officials feared mass conversion of Jews would diminish the financial aid traditionally received from Jews by the state, a coercive policy of conversion won the day, depriving the Jewish community of many of its best and brightest.

The "interpretation" of the Edict of Emancipation spiked conversions and baptisms of Jews from a mere 10 a year in the late 18th century to huge numbers of baptized infants in the early 19th. Parents "crawled to the cross" with their children in the fond hope of seeing them grow up to be secure Christians, thereby sparing them the painful internal and external conflicts that bedeviled the lives of their parents. Seeing the writing on the wall, adult Jews also rushed to change their family names to fit their new civic status, another step away from traditional Judaism without leaving it altogether.

If there was any doubt remaining that the German state had no intention to give emancipated Jews the same rights as emancipated Germans, the so-called "Gans Law" (1822) dispelled it. Eduard Gans was the prize student of G.W.F. Hegel, the age's most celebrated philosopher, and like all young professionals, he wanted to become a powerful and influential man, to which end he sought a position in the university's law faculty.

Although his famous mentor defended Jewish emancipation without conversion and argued the right of a Jew to become a professor, denial came quickly from the university, while the

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state clarified official policy to mean that only a Christian could be an employee of the state. Within months of that ruling Lea and Abraham Mendelssohn, who had earlier put their children in the Lutheran faith, now joined them there, explaining that they wanted their family to be secure "in the creed of most civilized people today."

On June 28, 1825, Heinrich Heine, a gifted but irreverent wit, also "crawled to the cross" for reasons of career and success. He called his Christian baptism "the entrance ticket to European culture," by which he then meant a hoped-for career as a law professor. As it worked out, he did not become a law professor and he came to regret his conversion. Yet the "Christian ticket" aided his vocational success as a pundit, increased his marriage options, and gave him an inner identity as a German.

For many other converted Jews with skin less thick than Heine's, painful ambivalence appears to have been the rule. Hertz's heroine, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, who converted rather sincerely and married a Christian nobleman, expressed that pain poignantly:

> The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life—having been born a Jewess—this I should on no account now wish to have missed.

It seems a singular oversight that Hertz does not discuss the content of the Judaic and Christian religions over which her subjects agonized so, the state of mind she describes as ambivalence. Reflecting modern times, she dwells instead on the material, socio-cultural, political, and demographic forces, all of which surface in the telling of this riveting story.

Yet in scattered statements throughout the book, when the Jews of the 18th and 19th centuries leave the faith of their fathers (however perfunctorily) for the faith of the Christians, they seem to be aware that they are dividing themselves between something uniquely transcendental at both ends of the journey. Perhaps for this reason, their lives, material and spiritual, although astraddle the old and the new faith, seem to be every bit as content as they are ambivalent. ♦

# Numbers of Sides

*'Many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse,' and beyond.* **BY DAVID GUASPARI**

The Pythagorean Theorem is perhaps the one mathematical fact an Average Joe might be able to name. It is ancient. Evidence of the Pythagorean Theorem can be found on Babylonian clay tablets from 1800 B.C.; versions exist in manuscripts from India *circa* 600 B.C. and from the Han Dynasty. The first rigorous proof is ascribed to Greeks of the school of Pythagoras, in the mid-6th century B.C.

**The Pythagorean Theorem**
*A 4,000-Year History*
by Eli Maor
Princeton, 286 pp., $24.95

Eli Maor says that the Pythagorean Theorem is "arguably the most frequently used theorem in all of mathematics" and makes that the premise, or McGuffin, for touring a swath of mathematical history. He aims at the general reader, wishing to provide both an intellectual adventure, complete with proofs, and a genial ramble. (An appended chronology notes that soon after "Einstein publishes his general theory of relativity . . . Stanley Jashemski, age nineteen, of Youngstown, Ohio, proposes possibly the shortest known proof of PT.")

He begins, regrettably, with a sin of anachronism—miscasting the original meaning of the Theorem into modern terms. Euclid's famous treatise on geometry presents us with a fact about area: If we draw a square on each side of a right triangle, the area of the square on the hypotenuse is the total of the areas of the squares on the other sides. Nowadays we are inclined to express this as an equation—$a^2+b^2=c^2$—in which $a$, $b$, and $c$ are *numbers* representing the lengths of the triangle's sides. Maor treats these as interchangeable formulations, and from the modern point of view they are.

*David Guaspari is a writer in Ithaca, New York.*

But Pythagoras and Euclid would find the modern version unintelligible, for reasons interesting and deep. They distinguished numbers, which are "multitudes" (that can be counted), from lengths, areas, and volumes, which are continuously varying "magnitudes." Multitudes differ essentially from magnitudes. And magnitudes themselves come in different kinds. We may meaningfully compare one line segment to another line segment (is it greater?) but not to a different kind of magnitude, such as a circle or a cube.

It makes sense to total the magnitudes of two squares, but not to total a square with a line. It makes sense to multiply numbers, obtaining another number as a result—three groups of four things amount to 12 things altogether. But it seems merely confused to speak of multiplying one line segment by another, of multiplying by something that is not a multiplicity.

Presented with these careful distinctions, and the rigorous and brilliant Greek science that respected them, a reader might suffer a profitable moment of uncertainty and discomfort, wondering how he could have thought in any other way—uncertain, at least for that moment, how there could be any coherent sense in (or any use for) some mongrel notion of "number" and practice of "algebra" that embraced the counting numbers and magnitudes of all kinds. Yet the massive triumphs of mathematical physics, for one thing, assure us that there can be.

We can't solve that problem here—to begin with, a rigorous mathematical account of the modern notion of number is highly technical—but it is illu-



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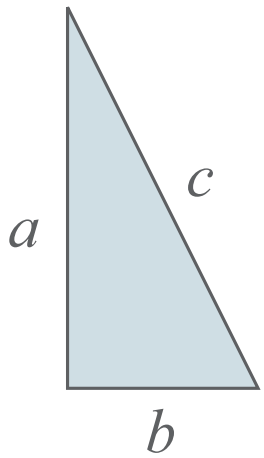
minating to consider a simple strategy that holds out hope of dissolving it: In ordinary speech we don't say that the length of a line is "three"—we say that it's "three feet" or "three furlongs" or some such thing. We choose a unit and measure the line as some multiple of the unit—at least, when it comes out exactly.

That suggests a way to unify the distinct quantitative ideas of multitude and magnitude case-by-case: Given a right triangle, for example, choose a unit of which all three sides are exact multiples. That assigns a number to each side and those numbers will satisfy $a^2+b^2=c^2$.




$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

This strategy fails, for an astonishing reason: The innocent assumption that we can always find such a unit is false. For example, there is no unit of which both the sides and the diagonal of a square are exact multiples. The Pythagoreans not only discovered that but *proved* it. Here shines one particular brilliance of Greek mathematics: that its results are established by proof. And so far as we know, the notion of mathematical proof—of developing an entire body of knowledge by rigorous deduction from a set of first principles—has emerged only once in human history.

For the Pythagoras cult, this had a tragic aspect. Scholars dispute about the precise beliefs of Pythagoras and his followers, but agree that they included a mystical conviction that numbers (multitudes) are, in some sense, the fundamental constituents of the world.

This seems to have received powerful support from the discovery, attributed to Pythagoras, that basic musical intervals are "rational." Stop a tensed violin string somewhere in the middle and consider the difference between the pitches produced by plucking its two parts. If the *ratio* between the lengths of those parts is two to one, the pitch difference is an octave; if two to three, it's a perfect fifth; and so on.

Note that the ratio of two lengths is the same as the ratio of two counting numbers precisely when there is a unit of which both lengths are exact multiples. An irrefutable proof that the sides and diagonal of a square are, in this sense, "irrational"—and that irrationality is an essential feature of the mathematical world—can only have been a metaphysical blow.

The first section of Maor's book stretches from the Babylonians to Archimedes, the greatest ancient mathematician, and one of the greatest ever. Insofar as it has a single theme, this section asks which societies knew of the Pythagorean Theorem, and in what form and in what way they knew it. The next thousand or so years get brief treatment as an interlude, an era of "translators and commentators"—illustrated by episodes from Chinese, Hindu, and Arabic, as well as Western, mathematics.

The final section begins in the mid-16th century with François Viète—often regarded as the first modern mathematician—and tells two related stories. One is the introduction of infinite methods and infinities into mathematics—controversial but successful innovations that had to wait 300 years for a rigorous basis. The other develops the "non-Euclidean" geometry that plays a central role in modern physics as the mathematical setting for Einstein's theory of general relativity.

The Pythagorean Theorem holds for figures drawn on a flat surface—that is, for the objects of Euclidean geometry. In other settings—figures drawn on the surface of a sphere, for example—it fails. The Theorem is a characteristic of flatness, hence its ubiquity: The calculations of trigonometry, of the lengths of lines (straight or curved), etc., are all intimately tied to it. The converse insight, that the geometry of a surface can be captured by describing the ways in which it deviates from the Pythagorean Theorem, makes it possible to represent and reason about unvisualizable geometries such as the "curved space-time" of Einstein's theory.

Maor ventilates these stories with frequent digressions. One (rather dull) chapter called "The Pythagorean Theorem in Art, Poetry, and Prose" provides a laundry list. There is the patter song from *The Pirates of Penzance* in which the modern major general boasts of his acquaintance "with many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse." There are encomia to Pythagoras from Johannes Kepler and (descending from the sublime) Jacob Bronowski. There is the famous story of Thomas Hobbes's exclamation, on first seeing the Pythagorean Theorem: "By God, this is impossible!"

Another chapter presents excerpts from the curious life work of Elisha Scott Loomis, who undertook to gather all known proofs of the Pythagorean Theorem—of which he found 371, including one by President James Garfield (before his election). Also included are brain teasers, mathematical curiosities, and a short essay on the possibility of composing a message that would be understood by intelligent life in distant galaxies.

Bits of potted history serve as glue. Not all of this is reliable, as when Plato's contribution to geometry is described as "his recognition of its importance to learning in general, to logical thinking, and, ultimately, to a healthy democracy." It is not likely that Plato was fond of diseased democracy, but safe to say that promoting democracy was not one of his concerns. Plato's interest in geometry was metaphysical: The relation between ideal geometric figures (grasped by reason) and the imperfect copies that we draw or otherwise encounter through our senses prefigures the relation between a Platonic form, such as Goodness, and its imperfect realizations in the world of ordinary experience.

It is hard to predict who would be charmed by *The Pythagorean Theorem*, but all will recognize the author's enthusiasm for his subject and his respect for the reader: Three cheers for including those proofs! ♦



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# The Word Is Out

*The textbook that teaches life is a text.*

**BY JAMES SEATON**

"Textualism," the notion that the world may and should be thought of as text, was once an esoteric theory available only to those who had worked their way through the works of Jacques Derrida. It has now joined Marxism, psychoanalysis, and New Historicism on the shelf of once-hot-but-no-longer-fashionable ideas. Textualism is enjoying a new life, however, as a view of the world disseminated to college freshmen in introductory writing classes. This anthology of readings, now in its second edition, advises freshmen that "we should think of our entire world as something that can and should be read. In short, we can think of the world as a text."

**The World Is a Text**
*Writing, Reading, and Thinking About Culture and Its Contexts*
by Jonathan Silverman and Dean Rader
Prentice Hall, 864 pp., $63.40

In the introduction, students learn that "the idea that the world is a text open to interpretation" derives from semiotics, and "in semiotics, the main idea is that everything is a sign of sorts." Students who absorb the lessons of the anthology "will become more critical and thoughtful readers of the complex text that is our world." Texts within this larger text include "human relationships" and "people." The editors even provide a reading that "suggests the ways in which you are a text, worthy and ready to be read."

So what? No doubt there are many ways in which it might be useful to think of objects, situations, and even people as texts "ready to be read," whatever one's semiotics. And there is little reason to worry that college students, even impressionable freshmen, are likely, in their excitement at learning from the anthology in their required writing class that they and other people are to be regarded as "texts," will neglect those aspects of their bodily existence that don't lend themselves to text-messaging.

Presumably, students will remember that, unlike traditional texts in books, which do not change once they are printed, they themselves are continuing to grow and change; they might sometimes become ill and eventually they will certainly die, an event that may be compared to a book going out of print but which is also quite different. Such differences between a human being and a text are so obvious they scarcely need mentioning. On the other hand, it seems at least possible that the appeal of the notion of the world as text, once confined to the high theory of Derrida's pronouncement that "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*," but now on offer to college freshmen, derives in large part from the blurring of such differences rather than from its supposed intellectual rigor.

It is often pointed out, usually by those sympathetic to Derrida, that intellectual rigor would require that "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" be translated as "There is no outside-text" rather than as "There is nothing outside the text." The English language version plays it safe by providing both translations (though only one is italicized, and the other one is bracketed) and also including the French. Derrida's pronouncement appears in *Of Grammatology* thusly: "*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]." Although the English translation seems to "privilege" the more famous version ("there is nothing outside the text") it is plausible that the alternate reading ("there is no outside-text") is closer to what Derrida himself intended.

There is, however, an explanation—beyond the disrepute of intentionality as a criterion of meaning—why it is the former phrasing that has become famous: The alternate translation lacks the transgressive extremism of the former. The phrasing of the alternate version encourages the possibility that its meaning is nothing scandalous or even particularly interesting.

Richard Rorty, in a sympathetic exposition, calls the assertion nothing more than a misleading way "of saying that we shall not see reality plain, unmasked, naked to our gaze." But of course, since few besides mystics would claim to "see reality plain, unmasked, naked to our gaze," there would be no reason for anyone to pay particular attention to the expression and to the philosophy it is thought to epitomize unless it were taken to mean something quite different, something shockingly contrary to our common-sense understanding of the world.

The expression "There is nothing outside the text" *does* succeed in suggesting that there is something unique, something shocking, something well worth our attention, in the philosophy it asserts, just because it seems so much at odds with common sense, just because it does seem to assert that, in some mysterious but profound sense, the anthology's title is literally true: "The world is a text."

And even though few if any are ready to defend that thesis as a literal statement of fact—indeed, the line taken by defenders usually rules out any appeal to factual claims of any kind—the fame of Jacques Derrida and the attraction of deconstruction surely derive, in some part, from the feeling of many (but by no means all) proponents that they are engaged in a radical enterprise at odds with bourgeois common sense, and perhaps even allied somehow to revolutionary politics.

*James Seaton is professor of English at Michigan State.*



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But there is also another, less obvious, source of attraction to the notion that "there is nothing outside the text." Today Americans—and, perhaps, young people in particular—are concerned about identity and seem often to be searching for some sort of definite and secure identity. If religion offers one answer to this search—that we each possess an immortal soul—advertising offers another. Advertising tells us that everything we eat or wear, any game we play and, naturally, anything we buy, is a sign that tells other people something about ourselves.

We proclaim our social status, our sexual prowess and availability, our moral and political convictions—we all wear our hearts on our sleeves, if we are to believe the commercials and advertising all around us. A philosophy that tells us that we are all texts waiting to be read is, indeed, in tune with the times. Learning the skills associated with this philosophy holds out the promise that we may become adept at sending out the particular messages we wish others to read, and also adept at reading between the lines of the messages we receive.

The suspicion remains that those (like the leading textualist Stanley Fish) who reject "the premise that any discourse must be measured against a stable and independent reality," still count the cash the clerk gives them back when they use a $20 bill to make a $10.37 purchase. Philosophic conviction has little effect on practice.

Does that matter? Perhaps not. Lionel Trilling's 1970 observation that "it is characteristic of the intellectual life of our culture that it fosters a form of assent which does not involve actual credence" seems, if anything, more pertinent than ever. Yet there are occasions when belief becomes important, and on some of the most significant of these, believing in the world as text provides little or no assistance. A belief in oneself as spirit or soul at least can provide some reassurance and offer some support in the face of illness and death. It is not clear that the philosophy of textualism can do as much.

The late Susan Sontag was once willing, like many other advanced thinkers, to think of cancer as a text revealing that one was guilt-ridden, uptight, repressed—in a word, bourgeois. It was with this notion in mind that she once declared that "the white race is the cancer of human history." The experience of actually having cancer led Sontag to the conclusion that some things, like cancer, like disease of any kind, should not be thought of as metaphors.

*The fame of Jacques Derrida and the attraction of deconstruction surely derive, in some part, from the feeling of many (but by no means all) proponents that they are engaged in a radical enterprise at odds with bourgeois common sense.*

The purpose of her book *Illness as Metaphor*, she explained, was to encourage others "to regard cancer as if it were just a disease—a very serious one, but just a disease. Not a curse, not a punishment, not an embarrassment." Without "meaning." Sontag's desire to regard cancer as without "meaning" would seem to be difficult to achieve in a world where there is nothing outside the text, or even one in which there is no "outside-text."

Textualism has a special appeal for college professors that it does not have for college freshmen. Trilling called attention in the 1950s to the characteristic "demand" of some intellectuals "for life as pure spirit," a demand that in its extremism would discount or deny what Trilling called "the actuality of the conditioned, the literality of matter, the peculiar authenticity and authority of the merely denotative."

Textualism seems to promise that literary critics can extend their expertise far beyond poems, plays, and novels, and even beyond films and television programs, to anything at all. Since everything is a text, and critics are the best readers of texts, it is literary critics who are best equipped to understand any phenomena whatsoever. Textualism provides a rationale that allows critics to comment on scientific theories without going to the trouble of boning up on physics or chemistry, just as it seems to license them to comment authoritatively on politics without making any particular study of history or economics.

This sort of appeal is very hard to resist. The attraction of an all-encompassing theory that allows one not only to make sense of what is otherwise a complex world but also to feel intellectually superior to bourgeois believers in common sense, is very strong—perhaps, especially, for would-be revolutionaries who end up in English departments. College freshmen, on the other hand, can probably be trusted to tell the difference between texts and things, despite advertising and despite their professors' assignment of *The World Is a Text* as required reading. ♦



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# Speak to Me

*'A credible glimpse of humankind at its best.'*

**BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

I've said it before and I'll say it again: Movies are never more affecting than when they show us people behaving with nobility and treating each other with kindness.

*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, a French film produced by a Hollywood studio and directed by a painter from New York, is a glorious example. To summarize *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is to make it sound unbearably painful. The movie tells the true story of a 43-year-old man struck down by a malady so severe that it leaves his entire body paralyzed save for his eyes and one eyelid—with his consciousness entirely intact. He learns to communicate through blinking in response to a list of letters. He manages to dictate a memoir of the experience using this unspeakably laborious process, only to contract pneumonia and die 10 days after the book is published.

**The Diving Bell and the Butterfly**
Directed by Julian Schnabel

And yet *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is wonderful—absolutely, completely wonderful—and for reasons that its critical admirers do not entirely understand. There has been a great deal of talk about how *The Diving Bell* is a flight of the imagination, a wondrous effort to display the power of the mind, and an example of poetic filmmaking that succeeds as few films ever have in offering a visual analogue to consciousness itself.

Perhaps *The Diving Bell* is all these things. Certainly its director, art-world hustler extraordinaire Julian Schnabel, would like the world to believe that no one has ever used the medium of film as he has. But if that were all there was to it, the movie would be a crashing bore, a pretentious labor, a work of towering vanity. It is anything but.

The movie is a miraculous feat not because of its abstract artistic goals, but because of its delicate, complex, and ultimately awe-inspiring portrait of the interplay between its nightmarishly inert but intellectually febrile protagonist and the dedicated, selfless, and loving people who surround him. The depiction of Jean-Dominique Bauby's effort to be understood, and the efforts of others to understand him, provides us with a rare and credible glimpse of humankind at its best.

All we know of Bauby (Mathieu Amalric), as the movie begins, is that he is a patient in a hospital bed. The first 10 minutes we spend looking entirely through his eyes, which flicker in and out of focus as they adjust to the world beyond the coma from which he has just emerged to find himself the victim of "locked-in syndrome." This is a condition so rare that the doctor who tells him about it must use the English words because there is no French name for it. We hear his thoughts, which are quizzical and confused and descend into despair only when one of his eyelids must be sewn shut to prevent a septic infection.

We learn that he is the editor of *Elle*, the fashion magazine, a pretty groovy man-about-Paris. He is a loving father to three children and a loving son to a vivid 92-year-old father (the peerless Max von Sydow, who proves with this film that he may be the only person on earth who is a great actor in four different languages). He is also a match for Nicolas Sarkozy in the romantic fidelity department. And yet Céline, the estranged mother of his children, rallies to his side, achieving a stoic and heroic serenity even as their horrified and heartbroken children must cope with the inert mass their father has become.

Céline (Emmanuelle Seigner) is one of the four angels in human form the film shows us. Joséphine (Marina Hands), the nurse who tends to him and is a devout believer, enlists the world's prayers on his behalf. Henriette (Marie-Josée Croze) is determined to work out a way for Bauby to communicate, and devises a system where she recites the alphabet beginning with the most commonly used letters. She stops when he blinks once. At first, the process is a frustrating horror for Bauby, but he surrenders himself to it. The third is Claude (Anne Consigny), who is engaged to take his blinking dictation when he decides to write a book about his experience.

The first sentence he dictates, as she struggles to get used to the challenge, is "Don't panic."

The brilliance of the screenplay and direction is evident from the way Schnabel and scenarist Ronald Harwood eagerly grasp hold of the letter recitation and use it to the movie's advantage. The constant repetition of the letters has a hypnotic, incantatory effect. It also gives the film's actresses an unparalleled opportunity to show off their chops, since they are, in effect, playing both their own characters and Bauby. And they do all of it beautifully.

*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* is, in the end, about the indelible quality of being *understood*. That the person who succeeds in making himself understood is about as difficult to understand as a person can be makes his achievement, and the achievement of the people around him, even more spectacular. I don't think it could be any better, and there has rarely been a movie as moving as *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*. ♦

*John Podhoretz, editorial director of* Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*



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***Astronauts placed the crown jewel of Europe's contribution to the International Space Station into its permanent setting on Monday with the attachment of the Columbus science module. . . . The $2 billion Columbus module, which adds 2,600 cubic feet of volume to the station . . . is the primary contribution to the project by the 17 countries of the European Space Agency.***

**—New York Times, *February 12, 2008***

ONE EURO

# 'COMPLETE, UTTER CHAOS' REIGNS IN SPACE STATION

## *Europeans Squabble, Demand New Espresso Machine*

By WARREN E. LEARY

COLOGNE, Germany — According to astronauts aboard the International Space Station, the problems started when the Columbus module was attached last month. At first, the additional crew, representing members of the European Space Agency, were enthusiastic about cooperating on projects like studying the effects of weightlessness on humans. (They were less thrilled to learn the Americans and Russians had already been working on this subject for some time.) But within a week, the Europeans were fighting among themselves over routine chores such as trash collection, bathroom cleanup, and even staffing the café.

In fact, the café has become a focal point of contention: Most of the astronauts complain about rude service or no service at all. Operated by the French, the café has been without an espresso machine for two weeks. The French, however, blame the Italians who brought the now defective espresso maker. The Italians have asked NASA to bring a new machine when the space shuttle returns in a few months. "Preferably one that serves Illy whole bean espresso," said one Italian astronaut. "It's available at Williams-Sonoma, which hopefully isn't too far from Cape Canaveral."

The primary responsibility of the Italians is the docking bay, which has been closed on more than a few occasions. (In one instance, the space shuttle *Atlantis* actually turned around and went back to Earth.) The Italians claim the bay has been closed for repairs ever since Irish astronauts rear-ended it with their mini-module following a drunken brawl at the British-run space pub.

European Space Agency

The Columbus module, represented here, is home to a multi-ethnic crew.

The Spanish crew members were on siesta and unavailable for comment on this story.

Tensions, however, remain extremely high in the Polish sector, a flat and open research space commonly used by the Germans. The German astronauts insist they are only passing through on their way to install the lasers.

"Lasers?" asked a Polish technician, who a few moments later overheard a German space commander telling an Austrian to "now witness the firepower of this fully armed and operational battle

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## *Grasp of Military, Foreign Affairs 'OK,' Says Obama*

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